104

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

Y 4.R 31/3:104-96

National Wildlife Refuge System, Se...

HEARING

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FOURTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

ON

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE BACKLOG IN THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

July 25, 1996
September 19, 1996

Serial No. 104–96

Printed for the use of the Committee on Resources

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NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

THURSDAY, JULY 25, 1996

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS, COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES,

Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10 a.m., in room 1334, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Jim Saxton (Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

STATEMENT OF HON. JIM SAXTON, A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM NEW JERSEY; AND CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS

Mr. SAXTON. We are going to begin, and I have an opening statement which I will read here in just a minute. But just let me say for purposes of logistical considerations, we are going to have approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes' worth of votes beginning at sometime around 10:20. And so, hopefully, we will be able to conclude the hearing by that time so that we won't have to keep everybody waiting around.

We are meeting today to discuss the operation and maintenance backlog of the National Wildlife Refuge System. At present, the system is comprised of 508 refuges, which are located in all 50 States and five U.S. Territories. In the last decade alone, 73 refuges and approximately 3 million acres have been added to the system.

As the Service has continued to acquire land, it has not managed to keep up with the basic levels of operation and maintenance needed to provide effective wildlife and habitat management or to meet public use needs. The Service's Maintenance Management System, MMS, estimated a total maintenance backlog for fiscal year 1995 of $386 million, and that estimate has now risen to $440 million.

The Service's maintenance operations and construction backlogs include visitor centers, picnic pavilions, observation towers, public use buildings; nearly 6,000 miles of roads, bridges, and parking areas; 5,500 miles of dikes, levees, dams, canals, and other water management structures; and 24,600 miles of fencing and posting. Of the backlog, $138 million is the result of work needed to improve waterfowl and migratory bird management and $115 million is needed for public use items.

These backlogs have become a serious concern for many refuge managers. They have caused the formation of a truly remarkable lobbying group called CARE, or the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge

Enhancement, which includes the Defenders of Wildlife, the National Rifle Association, the National Audubon Society, and the Safari Club International.

Our one witness today from the Department of Interior will be addressing the Subcommittee's concerns about the operation and maintenance backlog. It is my hope that we will hold a second day of hearings on this critical issue in September, and we will hear from State and public witnesses at that time. That is my opening statement, and so, Dr. Streeter, if you would like to enlighten us from your vantage point relative to these issues?

STATEMENT OF DR. ROBERT STREETER, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR REFUGES AND WILDLIFE, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mr. STREETER. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much, and we really do appreciate this opportunity to address this topic. I do have a written statement that has been submitted for the record. I would like to highlight a few other things this morning if I might.

As you know, the refuge system will mark its centennial anniversary in just 7 years, in the year 2003. And we in the Fish and Wildlife Service are really privileged to be the land stewards for this system, and it is really one of the world's great conservation successes.

The system has a proud heritage, and with your support and that of the American public, a bright and promising future for carrying out its mission, saving special places for wildlife, for wild things.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is a very special collection of unique lands critical to the existence of some species, extremely productive for others, stepping stones for spectacular migrations of migratory birds across the continent.

Mr. Chairman, there are fewer and fewer of these special places. Usually, we have two choices: you save it now or you pave it now. Sometimes, but not very often, we do get a second chance, and when that happens, we usually pay more later when we have to restore habitats.

For us, the choice is clear. When there is important wildlife habitat that becomes threatened, permanent protection for future generations is found in additional acquisition in the refuge system. Our late Director, Molly Beatty, said it best perhaps. "What a country chooses to save for itself is what a country chooses to say about itself."

Mr. Chairman, I might say that we acquire only a minimum amount of land necessary. About two-tenths of 1 percent of the total land holdings is added to the system each year. Before we buy that land, we exhaust every other means of protection from conservation easements, leases, agreements, and memoranda of understanding with private partners. And also we will help State and private partners actually provide the protection rather than being in the refuge system.

Quite often, Mr. Chairman, as you know, we also acquire lands because Members of Congress ask us to. They provide the appropriations and direction to do that. But for all the lands we manage, we also owe it to the American public and to you to adequately

plan the management and use of each refuge complex with open public participation.

As you well stated today's problems concerning operation and maintenance of this system, you understand it well, and it is not new. The very first refuge manager we had was at Pelican Island, and it was a warden paid by the Audubon Society. What most of us didn't know, and what I certainly didn't know until recently, is this pattern continued in many of our initial refuges with Audubon Society picking up the tab for the wardens on those lands.

We feel it is time to break that historical pattern of benign neglect in our National Wildlife Refuge System. These lands belong to all Americans—the whole American public—and they have value beyond computation. And we need to understand the full needs and respond to the responsibility that is placed on us. We will continue to aggressively seek out partnerships or shared stewardship, but the tremendous capital investment cannot be maintained and operated on a voluntary basis.

We tried to be fiscally responsible through our share to reduce the growth in the Federal Budget. We have requested funding for only the highest priority, most pressing needs. We have complexed refuges. We have mothballed others. We still have a problem. It is both broad and deep. We have refuges operating at less than 75 percent of the capability of the land. We operate a 1.5 billion acre refuge with just 10 employees.

The public is denied access to many lands because roads are impassable or treacherous. We don't have the sanitary facilities for them. We have an increase in acts of lawlessness raging from the destruction of property, drug parties, smuggling, shootings, illegal immigration. We have 49 full-time refuge law enforcement officers for more than 500 national wildlife refuges.

We are being invaded and losing precious habitat to noxious weeds, invasions by other nonindigenous species, erosion, and just neglect of the facilities. Black duck and other waterfowl production has dropped on some refuges. Piping plover breeding success has dropped on some because we cannot provide the needs. So both the public and the wildlife have suffered.

By necessity and habit, we run a very tight ship. We have operated the refuge lands historically at a fraction of what other land management agencies spend. We will continue to do so, but we need to face more pressing issues, as you have pointed out.

We do have deferred maintenance and the backlog has increased, and this just results in a greater future cost. If we were a modern business, we would be well down the road to bankruptcy. I think we can see the destination. We have a strategy to forestall complete collapse of the system, and it is about a six-part strategy which I will talk about later if you have interest.

The backlog for our major maintenance and construction is, in the 1995 numbers, $386 million, and that would take care of $4.5 billion capital assets. I could go on and go into more details. I think it would be better to respond to your questions.

I might just add that as we approach the 100th anniversary of the refuge system, we have a special week set aside each week, and it is the week of October 5 through 13, and you and members of this honorable Committee will receive invitations to participate

with us and learn more about the refuges firsthand. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for receiving the written testimony and my comments.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Robert Streeter may be found at end of hearing.]

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you, Dr. Streeter. Obviously, this matter is of great concern to the Subcommittee. And just for our guidance, what level of funding do you guess it would require over say a five or 10-year period to bring us up to where we think we ought to be?

Mr. STREETER. On just the maintenance backlog or full operation of the refuges?

Mr. SAXTON. Well, let us talk about maintenance backlog just for purposes of discussion here.

Mr. STREETER. This backlog that we had in 1995 numbers would take a total of $290 million in operations and $150 million in construction. And so that is the backlog. Stretched over 10 years, you know, that is nearly $40 million a year just to reduce the backlog, but that backlog continues.

We have estimated, based on industry standards, of one and a half to 4 percent of your capital investment that is required annually to just keep and maintain, that would be in the neighborhood of $67—$68 million a year. We get about $20 million now so we would also then need on an annual basis, in addition to the amount to reduce the backlog, in the neighborhood of $40 or $50 million annually to just do the required maintenance each year.

Mr. SAXTON. Help me out. Add that all up for me so that I know what the total figure is.

Mr. STREETER. OK. Over say a 10-year period, if you have about $40 million required to reduce the backlog and $50 million additional required for the annual operating, we are looking at a neighborhood of $90 million a year based on current estimates. And this is more than a guess. This is based on a system we have of asking refuge managers to tell us each year what they see that maintenance backlog is.

Mr. SAXTON. OK. Now, let us talk about your construction backlog, which is in addition to your operation backlog, as I understand it. So we are talking about a relatively big number here when we get all these together?

Mr. STREETER. We are talking of the current backlog of construction and maintenance in 1995 terms of $386 million. That is the backlog.

Mr. SAXTON. So, once again, over 10 years?

Mr. STREETER. For 10 years, round it off to $40 million a year. That is to work on the backlog. The current needs, if you look at industry standards, would be in the neighborhood of about an additional $50 million a year. That would be to maintain what we have. That doesn't go into new construction, to provide new roads, new facilities to maximize use of the refuges.

Mr. SAXTON. So if we could appropriate an additional $125 to $130 million a year, it would put us in a position where we could say we could see light at the end of the tunnel, which would be 10 years away?

Mr. STREETER. Yes, sir. That is with the existing backlog and the current level of operations.

Mr. SAXTON. You mentioned the volunteer program or I think your statement was that volunteerism can't make much of a dent or can't help all that much with this situation. Is that a fair assessment of what you said?

Mr. STREETER. Yes, sir. That is a fair assessment. We currently have a very active volunteer program, and that volunteer program adds tens of thousands of dollars of basically staff time to help when visitor centers do census, mow lawns, just a variety of things. These volunteers are usually people that we don't have to provide much for, maybe a pad for them to park a trailer, a shirt and a cap, and they provide the labor.

We also have what are called friends groups or associations at different refuges, local citizen groups who have adopted a refuge. They may run a visitors center. They may run a concession with some of that money going back to critical management needs.

And we have a lot of partnerships with NGO's, nongovernment organizations—Ducks Unlimited, National Audubon Society, National Rifle Association—other organizations who have at one refuge or another been willing to put some of their resources into the land. And then we have management agreements with State agencies.

And I guess I am going to have to mention something I have learned as I have gone out in the field and talked to some of these individuals out there. There is a lot of unpaid-for overtime, a commitment of the people out there. They are doing things nights, weekends. Their families are with them. They get free tractors from an Army Surplus, make one out of it.

Those kind of things are going on just to keep the system barely moving along. So there is a wide variety of things that the Service has happening—volunteerism, partners, and just the type of people we have that keep it from collapsing.

Mr. SAXTON. Is there an ongoing directed effort within the Fish and Wildlife Service to promote volunteerism?

Mr. STREETER. Yes, sir. And I might use volunteerism both for peer volunteers and also the volunteer friends groups, as we call them. An NGO—I believe it is the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation—mothers have put money into training courses to train local interest that want to help start friends groups at refuges, and we encourage that. And we provide facilities where possible and technical assistance to those friends groups to get started. We have active solicitation for volunteers at our other refuges.

Mr. SAXTON. Do you have a group of people that would be dedicated for this purpose, or is this carried out more on an informal basis by refuge managers and like folks?

Mr. STREETER. There is a mix. It is usually an other duty as an assigned type of thing. Now, at a few refuges we have a public use specialist who might be committed full time to helping with a volunteer program that has several hundred members, and we gained certainly more than that one person FTE cost. San Francisco National Wildlife Refuge is an example, where we have a very large friends group, and they have volunteers coordinating the volunteers even.

Mr. SAXTON. I think this is extremely important for a whole variety of reasons which I don't need to go into. And the reason that

I am interested in this in particular is because I have seen instances where volunteers have actually been discouraged by refuge managers from being active, and they have walked away in disgust. I am sure it is the exception rather than the rule, but I just think this is so very important for, as I said, a variety of reasons.

Let me move on to another issue. The House, obviously, passed the Refuge Management bill, which includes a provision that requires that lands acquired by the Fish and Wildlife Service remain open for historic uses until the Service completes a conservation management plan and determines that these lands be closed or that part of the land be closed or closed to certain uses.

I understand that the administration is considering changing the current closed-until-open policy to a more reasonable and fair open-until-closed policy. Has this change in policy occurred and, if not, when will it?

Mr. STREETER. Yes, sir. It has already been initiated and on the ground has occurred in a refuge. I believe the name of it is Cossatot in Arkansas, where we have planning sessions set up to have what we call seamless planning from acquisition to operations.

There was an Executive Order signed by the President which also has a component that basically has encouraged us to promote this policy of open till closed. And we have our refuge acquisition men and women who are implementing that in the regions at various paces, but it is in active implementation.

We really agree. It is a travesty for us to go into an area and buy a piece of land without the public having some idea of its value. And that is why I believe the planning is so important too, where we bring in public participation.

Mr. SAXTON. The famous New Jersey Forsythe Refuge does not currently have a conservation management plan in place, and that plan is not scheduled to be written until fiscal year 1997. The lack of such a plan has led to my concern about the closed-until-open policy. When is that plan scheduled to be written, can it be completed, and can the completion be moved forward?

Mr. STREETER. It is currently scheduled, I believe, to begin in 1997 and be completed in fiscal year 1998. And any of these plans can be shifted around if there is adequate reason to do so. But at this point, each region has a plan for moving through a tremendous backlog of comprehensive planning.

Depending on what we get in fiscal year 1997, we hope that we will have in the neighborhood of a total of $2.9 million to put toward comprehensive planning, and that is being allocated out to a plan to plan, if you will. We have a whole list in every region of the proposed comprehensive plans and how the region wanted to pursue that. And Forsythe is on the schedule for 1997–98.

Mr. SAXTON. Yes. I wonder if we might visit the issue of whether or not that plan might be expedited. I would certainly appreciate any consideration that it might be given.

Mr. STREETER. We can revisit that with our regional chairman.

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you. Mr. Torkildsen has arrived. Do you have some questions?

Mr. TORKILDSEN. Yes, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much, and I thank Dr. Streeter for being here. As you may be aware, Dr.

Streeter, I have the Parker River Wildlife Refuge in my district in Massachusetts, a beautiful stretch of Plum Island, which is visited by folks from literally around the world because of the number of bird species that choose it as their habitat for different parts of the year. Just in general, what type of maintenance backlogs is the Service experiencing in New England overall right now?

Mr. STREETER. Nationwide, our backlog in 1995 terms is $386 million, and that includes $290 million for operation and major maintenance and $150 million in construction. I have in my materials here a breakdown by region, by State, et cetera. And rather than take time—Mr. Chairman had mentioned that you are on a time limitation—I could provide that following the session.

Mr. TORKILDSEN. That would be fine. If you could provide it for the record, as well as to me individually, I would appreciate that. Currently, facilities at Parker River National Wildlife Refuge are in disrepair and unable to meet the needs of daily operation. Office space is inadequate.

I don't know if you have personally been up there, but if you have, you know exactly what I am talking about. The buildings are not accessible to the disabled and contain outdated electrical wiring. You know, what is the Service doing to improve conditions at the Parker refuge?

Mr. STREETER. Parker is just one of our facilities that, as I mentioned earlier on—the system is—if we were a business, we would be on the road to bankruptcy. Parker River is one of those refuges in New England and across the system where we really have inadequate facilities to provide the public use that is compatible with the wildlife and that the public demands.

And we have allocated out the moneys that we do have to the region, and they are trying to reach those highest priorities. We have a maintenance management system that has listed those priorities, and I can get that information later as to where Parker River stands for that maintenance backlog that they have there. If we put special attention to Parker River and Forsythe—I mean, it is squeezing the bubble type of thing.

Mr. TORKILDSEN. You will make two Members of Congress feel that you are making great progress. Yes. Just a couple of other quick points. One, from my information, Parker River has the second largest or the second highest number of visitors each year. Is that consistent with what you know, doctor?

Mr. STREETER. Yes. It is close. There are about three that have a tremendous visitation—neighborhood of 400—500,000 visitors a year.

Mr. TORKILDSEN. And Parker is one of those from your numbers?

Mr. STREETER. One of the higher ones.

Mr. TORKILDSEN. Yes. So, clearly, the public demand is there for this refuge. It is not just an area that is left out on its own. There is a very significant human involvement with the refuge, and because it is there and it has, I think, a unique attraction, but if not unique, certainly very close to unique attraction?

Mr. STREETER. Yes, sir. In fact, just this spring, it had so much demands, someone ran through the gate and destroyed the gates so they could get in when it was closed. That is a little humor there, but aside, we do have a tremendous demand at Parker

River. And there are times when they are not all allowed in. It is simply the demand is greater than the capacity of the area. We have the compatibility issue too—how many people can be allowed and still be compatible with the purposes of the refuge.

Mr. TORKILDSEN. Yes. I have experienced both ends of it. When I want to visit the refuge, I know enough to go early in the morning because at a certain point in the day, once a certain number of humans are there, the gates are shut. And for those of us who don't want to drive through the gates, we do respect that and have to come back on another day.

Just in a general question then, what level of annual spending would you say would be necessary to eliminate the backlog? I know it may be a number that is not possible to come up with, and we are going to need to look at ways of making every dollar more effective in its reach. But what would you be looking at to bridge what clearly is a gap between what is needed and what is available right now?

Mr. SAXTON. Why don't you just do the short answer since we have already been over this territory?

Mr. STREETER. Yes, sir. In the neighborhood of $90 to $120 million a year—taking care of the backlog and the existing needs that are there. That doesn't mean any new construction or expanded use. That is just existing.

Mr. TORKILDSEN. Existing. Well, thank you for your answers and appreciate your being aware of the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge and the Service's support for it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SAXTON. Before I forget, let me ask unanimous consent to include Mr. Young's statement in the record.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Young follows:]

STATEMENT OF HON. DON YOUNG, A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM ALASKA; AND CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

Mr. Chairman, I commend you for holding this hearing on the operation and maintenance of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Our Refuge System provides essential habitat for hundreds of fish and wildlife species including a number that are listed as threatened or endangered. Refuges exist in all 50 States and they provide unique and much needed recreational and educational opportunities for millions of Americans.

Unfortunately, the System is currently burdened with expensive unmet maintenance needs and is unable to realize its full potential for species protection, recreational opportunities, or wildlife education because of a growing backlog of operating and maintenance projects. The System also suffers from a lack of useful up-to-date conservation management plans for most of our refuges.

This absence of planning and the Service's inability to meet refuge operation and maintenance needs is particularly distressing in light of the ongoing expansion of the Refuge System. While the maintenance backlog grew by $50 million in fiscal year 1996, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service spent $30 million to acquire new refuge lands—lands for which conservation plans must be written, but where there is little hope that funds will be available to implement them.

We are fortunate in Alaska that the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) required management plans for our refuges. However, like the rest of the country, even with these plans in place, there is still a significant backlog of work that needs to be completed to maximize the benefits these refuges could provide. The maintenance backlog alone is now more than $20 million.

Earlier this year the House of Representatives passed by a wide majority my comprehensive wildlife refuge reform bill, which requires the completion of comprehensive conservation management plans for all 508 refuges within 15 years. I hope that this legislation will provide a first step toward identifying the Refuge System's full potential and will be an impetus for meeting both wildlife and the public's needs.

Again, I compliment Chairman Saxton for scheduling this important oversight hearing and I look forward to hearing how the Department of the Interior intends to reduce, if not eliminate, these unacceptable backlogs.

Mr. SAXTON. One final question, Doctor. In terms of the marine sanctuaries that this Subcommittee has been dealing with, we are aware that before a marine sanctuary can be finally designated, that a management plan must be prepared and be adopted, and then and only then can the sanctuary be established in a formal sense. Does it make any sense to look at an approach such as that with regard to the refuge system?

Mr. STREETER. Mr. Chairman, it does from the perspective if we were able to go out and designate boundaries and acquire all of that land all at once, then one could develop a plan at the front end. But because most of our refuges we designate a boundary and through an early planning process with the public to determine just what exactly the refuge boundary will be and then acquisition is phased out over many years, oftentimes we couldn't develop such a plan till a certain percent of that land were actually acquired and available.

And I think it would be more of a waste of money to do a detailed comprehensive plan till you had adequate land base in that particular refuge. So ideally it sounds good. I don't think it would work on the practical sense in most cases.

Mr. SAXTON. All right. Thank you very much. I apologize for the abbreviated nature of this hearing. However, we have very little choice but to comply with the schedule set by the House. And so at this time, the hearing is adjourned.

Mr. STREETER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you very much, Doctor.

Mr. STREETER. And please do expect an invitation we will be sending out to all members of the Committee for some things. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 10:27 a.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned; and the following was submitted for the record:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. ROBERT STREETER

TESTIMONY OF DR. ROBERT STREETER, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR REFUGES AND WILDLIFE, UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS, OVERSIGHT HEARING REGARDING MAINTENANCE AND PLANNING FOR THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

July 25, 1996

Thank you for inviting us to discuss planning and maintenance on our National Wildlife Refuges.

Since the establishment of Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge off the coast of Florida in 1903, the National Wildlife Refuge System has grown to include 510 refuges, 38 Wetland Management Districts and various other interests totaling more than 92 million acres in all 50 states and territories. A dedicated workforce of 2,200 refuge staff administer these diverse holdings to conserve and manage fish, wildlife, and plant resources for the benefit of present and future generations. As a comparison, the National Park Service has a staff of approximately 17,000 to administer 369 park units on 83.3 million acres.

The Refuge System varies a great deal in structure, purpose, use and management. It includes vast Alaskan expanses virtually untouched by human activities; rich but rare prairie habitat for breeding migratory birds; feeding and resting areas for waterfowl and other wildlife; smaller urban refuges with high potential for recreation and education; and sanctuary for endangered species. The purpose of this diverse network of lands is fish and wildlife

use and invites participation by other organizations and the public.

Protection and management of this system is not without cost however. Staff and funding are directed to such things as water management facilities, inventories of resources, public use, habitat improvement, and the maintenance of roads, trails, buildings, utilities, equipment and other structures and facilities.

These needs, along with new legislative mandates, inflationary impacts, aging equipment and facilities, and increasing public demands for recreation, have exacerbated the need for funds to maintain these facilities and equipment.

We have two categories of refuge maintenance, in addition to large projects funded from the construction account:

- operational maintenance - custodial work needed to operate refuge facilities on a day-to-day basis; and

- major maintenance - periodic work needed to sustain the useful life of equipment or a facility, including routine rehabilitation and replacement of structures or equipment.

The construction account includes large-scale facility rehabilitation or replacement, dam and bridge inspection and repair, environmental compliance management, and seismic inspection.

In 1984 we established a Maintenance Management System to identify and prioritize our major maintenance needs. Our maintenance program management was further refined when we adopted recommendations from an audit by the Interior Department's Office of the Inspector General in 1992. The Inspector General found that the Fish and Wildlife Service was not maintaining refuges in a manner that would effectively enhance and protect the wildlife habitat and provide a safe and aesthetic experience for the visiting public. The Inspector General determined that funding requests are not adequate to slow the growth of the maintenance backlog.

The Service agreed to develop a maintenance backlog reduction plan and to increase consideration of the impacts of new refuges on operations and maintenance funding. These two actions have been undertaken and we are developing comprehensive management plans.

Capital assets on refuges are extensive and consist of water management facilities, roads, fences, bridges, buildings, utilities, other structures and equipment. Accumulated over the

last 93 years, their age and condition varies. These assets are conservatively estimated to exceed $4 billion in value.

Recommended maintenance reinvestment rates range from 1.5 to 4 percent, based on industry standards. The maintenance reinvestment rate for refuges over the past decade has averaged about 1.13 percent. Based on the lowest recommended rate of 1.5 percent, our current annual need for maintenance to prevent growth of the backlog would need to be substantially greater than this. As reported by the Inspector General, substantial increases are needed, dispersed over a reasonable period, to address the present backlog.

In FY 1996 $25.9 million was appropriated for operational maintenance, and $20.5 million for major maintenance. This year the Administration has requested a six percent increase, or an additional $1,581,000, for a total of $27.5 million for operational maintenance. We received $31,100,000 for refuge construction in FY 1996, including some unrequested new facilities; the Administration's request for FY 1997 is $16,956,000.

The maintenance backlog as of fiscal year 1995 was $386 million. This includes $127 million in construction projects and $259 million in operational and major maintenance projects. The Service is well aware of the need to reduce the backlog, and will

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continue to propose gradual resource enhancements over time to do so. We are also reviewing our current system for prioritizing our maintenance and construction funding needs with a view to ensuring funds are directed to the highest priorities.

Deferred maintenance and backlogs result in greater future costs. These may be direct costs in the form of more rapid asset deterioration requiring greater eventual expenditures to rehabilitate or replace, or indirect costs, such as curtailment of management activities due to equipment and facilities which do not function properly, reduced visitor experiences and reduced resource values.

The second issue you requested that we address was planning. Comprehensive management plans provide blueprints for management of the Refuge System. These plans are conducted with public involvement; they define objectives, document the status of resources and outline a plan of action to guide management of refuges with community support. When completed they will enhance the ability to focus limited budgets on highest priority needs.

Presently about 90 refuges have approved comprehensive plans and an additional 255 plans are needed to support all units of the Refuge System. The requested budget increase of $2.5 million in FY 1997 will allow completion or initiation of 48 new plans. The increase in FY 1997, combined with base funding of $400,000, will

allow all remaining refuges to be comprehensively planned over a 12-year time period.

I would note that the lack of a comprehensive plan for a refuge does not mean that there is no planning at the refuge. Individual plans with varying levels of complexity and public involvement are done for most activities that occur on a refuge. These typically would include habitat management plans, management plans for high-priority species of fish and wildlife, and public use management plans.

The third issue you requested us to address was the justification for further expansion of the Refuge System in the face of the growing maintenance backlog. There is the perception that in recent years the Land and Water Conservation Fund has been used primarily to establish new refuges. However, over the past two years there have been eight new refuges added to the System. Of these, only two were established as a result of the Administration's budget request.

Three were established as a result of Congressional action on the appropriations bill, one was a donation of nationally significant habitat, one consists of secondary jurisdiction over military lands, and the last was created by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission. In the last two fiscal years, the Service has requested Land and Water Conservation Fund money for

only four new refuges, all of which would provide habitats for endangered species or protect critically threatened wetlands. Of the four, only one has been funded.

The bulk of the appropriated funds have been used for acquisition of inholdings within existing refuges. From FY 1993 through FY 1995, the Service acquired approximately 165,000 acres as additions to the Refuge System, of which 138,463 were at existing refuges and only 26,537, or 16%, at new refuges.

There remain lands critical to fish and wildlife conservation that need to be protected through acquisition of property interests. Although the Administration's 1997 request for land acquisition for the Fish and Wildlife Service is reduced from previous years, focusing on only the most essential tracts within existing refuges and on nationally significant fish and wildlife habitats, land acquisition must continue. This is particularly true for endangered species, whose habitat continues to be threatened; in some cases, Federal acquisition is the only readily available means of protection.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the only reason the Fish and Wildlife Service acquires land or interests in land is to protect it as wildlife habitat when other options are not available. Provision of structures, equipment and facilities on refuges, and even staffing, is generally secondary to the

protection of the fish and wildlife habitat. A backlog in maintaining facilities at existing refuges is not a reason to stop protecting additional habitat. They are different issues, addressed through differing funding sources, and each needs to be evaluated in terms of priorities and available resources for that program.

In summary, the Refuge System has been challenged by lack of adequate maintenance funding; however, much is being done within the current budget, and we are proposing additional resources for fiscal year 1997. Our strategy for the future involves: 1) limiting acquisition to only protecting lands that are critical to national priorities or that provide management efficiencies for existing lands; 2) developing comprehensive plans in a way that engages the American public and focuses on the highest priority projects; 3) continuing to work with the public through volunteerism, cost sharing, and related efforts to maximize available funding; 4) keeping public use and other facilities low impact and low cost as a routine part of our business; and 5) raising the awareness of the value of these unique and often poorly understood lands.

As stewards of the Refuge System, we place a high value on our treasured natural resources and the need to protect and manage them for the benefit of present and future generations. We believe America does too. Increased maintenance should be viewed

as an investment in this valued natural heritage.

This concludes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES (PART II)

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 1996

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10 a.m., in room 1334 Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Jim Saxton (Chairman of the Subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. SAXTON. Welcome aboard, Mr. Brewster. Glad you are here.

Mr. BREWSTER. Glad to be here, Mr. Chairman.

STATEMENT OF HON. JIM SAXTON, A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM NEW JERSEY; AND CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS

Mr. SAXTON. Because of the uncertainty—we were just talking about if we were adjourning, and I guess nobody knows, but in any event I would just like to take this opportunity to take just a minute to recap what the subcommittee has accomplished during the 104th Congress, which I think is quite good. We have actually had 39 hearings and markups. We considered 50 bills, 33 which passed the House and 13 which actually became law. I am told by the staff that within the next couple of weeks we may have a couple of other successes in terms of bills that we have been working on thus far. We have heard from 339 witnesses. You will be 340, sir.

All of this took a lot of work from the subcommittee staff, all of whom deserve a lot of credit for a job well done. Let me just recognize staff members that are here this morning. Maybe some may not be here. Harry Burroughs, our subcommittee staff director, he has done a great job; Kathy Miller; Lisa Rulli, who have—she is among the missing who have done great jobs; and of course Bonnie Bruce and Sharon McKenna and John Rayfield and Shelly Sparck and Dave Whaley and all of our legislative staffers we have mentioned, and Marshall Hayes, our sea grant fellow—all those folks have just done a wonderful job for us and we appreciate it very much. People come to visit me in the office and say a comment commending the subcommittee, and I just want to take this opportunity this morning to say that without the folks that I just mentioned, needless to say, none of this would have been possible.

Turning to the matter at hand, we are meeting today to discuss the operation and maintenance backlog in the National Wildlife Refuge System. At present, the system is comprised of 510 refuges, which are located in all 50 States. In the last decade alone, 75 ref-

uges and approximately three million acres have been added to the system. As the Service has continued to acquire the land, it has not managed to keep up with basic levels of operation and maintenance needed to provide effective wildlife and habitat management or to meet public needs.

The Service estimates a total maintenance backlog of over $440 million. This backlog and the large construction backlog include visitor centers, picnic pavilions, observer's towers, public use buildings, nearly 6,000 miles of roads, bridges and parking areas, 5,500 miles of dikes, levees, dams, canals and other water management structures, and 24,600 miles of fencing and posting. A big job. Of the backlog, $138 million is the result of the work needed to improve waterfowl and migratory bird management and $115 million is needed for public use items.

These backlogs have become a serious concern for many refuge managers and the subcommittee heard testimony from the Fish and Wildlife Service on this problem in July. Concern over the effects of this lack of operation and maintenance funds led to the formation of a truly remarkable lobbying group called CARE, which is Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement, which includes the Defenders of Wildlife, the National Rifle Association, the National Audubon Society, as well as Safari Club.

I look forward to hearing from the representatives of CARE today, as well as other public witnesses. So thank you all for being with us here again today. And we will begin with our friend and colleague.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Jim Saxton follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. JIM SAXTON

We are meeting today to discuss the opperation and maintenance backlog in the National Wildlife Refuge System. At presetn, the System is comprised of 510 refuges, which are locatedin all 50 States. In the last decade along, 75 refuges and approximately 3 million acres have been added to the System. As the Service has continued to acquire land, it has not managed to keep up with basic levels of operation and maintenance needed to provide effective wildlife and habitat management or to meet public use needs.

The Service estimates a total maintenance backlog of more than $440 million. This backlog and the large construction backlog include visitor center; picnic pavilions; observation towers; public use buildings; nearly 6,000 miles of roads, bridges, and parking areas; 5,500 miles of dikes, levees, dams, canals, and other water management structures; and 24,600 miles of fencing and posting. Of the backlog, $138 million is the result of work needed to improve waterfowl and migratory bird management and $115 million is needed for public use items.

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I look forward to hearing from the CARE representatives this morning, as well as our other public witnesses.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Farr, I didn't see you come in. Do you have an opening statement, sir?

Mr. FARR. A quick one, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

STATEMENT OF HON. SAM FARR, A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM CALIFORNIA

Mr. FARR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I think our wildlife refuge system is a crucial environmental and recreational resource for the American people. Refuge systems are the most effective and lasting tool we have to conserve wildlife in this country. Unfortunately, as you pointed out, we have neglected to support our refuges by providing adequate funding. Instead, we have let the management and maintenance backlogs grow even larger, as you pointed out. In two small refuges in my district, the backlog totals $900,000.

It appears that much of the solution to the problem is more money. Efficiencies can help, but at the end of the day we have to face the fact that we will get no more blood out of this turnip. In fixing the backlog problem, we have to be careful not to neglect the purpose for which refuge land was acquired. Some argue we shouldn't buy more land when we aren't taking proper care of what we have right now. I think this is terribly short-sighted. Acquisitions with land and water conservation funds are mostly devoted to completing existing refuge by buying inholding. This helps save money by reducing management costs. Also, new refuges can often be the most economic and effective way of conserving threatened or endangered species.

And I wanted to suggest, Mr. Chairman, that as we suggest ways of finding more money, that we in Congress have a solution, and that is the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is the revenue derived from offshore oil. That money comes to the Federal Government almost a billion dollars a year. This year the appropriators appropriated 40 million of that, of almost a billion dollars, and put the rest of it in a lock box. It seems to me that if we want to get money that is already in the bank appropriated for State, local and Federal infrastructure improvements to our publicly held lands, then we ought to as members of this Congress and certainly Members of this committee in next year's session ratchet up appropriations that are needed.

The authorization, if I understand Mr. Vento, is about a billion dollars a year, so this is a fund that is fully under appropriated with adequate sums in the bank to pay for it. So we don't need to raise any taxes or do any more deficit reductions. There is no problem with spending that money. It is just the will of Congress to do it. And I suggest that is one pile that we who all get elected next November come back here and make that one of our priorities. And I would be glad to work with both of you doing that. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you, Sam. Sam, before you came in, I noted that our staff has been very valuable in helping us to perform our duties in this term. I didn't see you come in. I am sorry about that, but as I looked over and saw you I also turned around and saw Chris Mann back here. And I think it is noteworthy for us to point out that we have done a lot of things successfully primarily because we have been able to do it together on a bipartisan basis. I think Chris and Marshall are a very important part of that. Thank you two.

Mr. FARR. Of all the committees and subcommittees I sit on, Mr. Chairman, this has been the most nonpartisan, bipartisan committee. We have essentially not had any disputes here at all, and I think we all have a concern for the resources which we are asked to set policy for. And I appreciate not only working with you, but your staff. And I think it has been a very amicable relationship to this otherwise continuous political conflict. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you. Mr. Brewster, if you would—we will start with you. You have a statement you want to make?

Mr. BREWSTER. Yes, sir.

Mr. SAXTON. Proceed, sir.

STATEMENT OF HON. BILL BREWSTER, A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM OKLAHOMA

Mr. BREWSTER. I would just like to thank you for the opportunity to come before your subcommittee today. As you are aware, Mr. Chairman, I have been in front of this subcommittee several times this year trying to find a solution to a problem with a refuge located in my district, the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge in Tishomingo, Oklahoma. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, after successfully running the refuge for 50 years, brought a new manager in and let him decide what was compatible and what was not compatible with the refuge. The refuge, which was once considered a gem, has now become a thorn in the side of many.

After 2 years of personally dealing with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge, they have finally been holding public meetings regarding the changes. Come to find out it wasn't the fishing and other related activities that were incompatible to the refuge's mission, but a lack of funding to oversee the activities that made them incompatible. In reviewing this situation, you would assume that this is the exception and not the rule, but to my dismay it seems to be the rule, looking at the amount of backlog. It is estimated for 1996 the refuge system is backlogged by $60 million in operation and maintenance, and this is just for 1996, a grand total of well over $400 million. This figure is inexcusable.

As we approach the 100th anniversary of the refuge system, we as a nation need to take a serious look at our refuge system and how we are going to get out of this astronomical backlog. Congress and the Fish and Wildlife Service are both to blame. We have been acquiring more and more land to add to the refuge system instead of trying to take care of what we already have. We need to shift the emphasis on and funding for acquisition of new lands to the operation and maintenance budget until this backlog is corrected.

I am sure that there are certain circumstances that will arise that require new land purchases, but these land purchases need to be scrutinized very closely. We have gotten ourselves into a real bind. We need not try to point fingers at whose fault it is and how we possibly got to this point, but instead cooperatively put our efforts into resolving the situation at hand.

Mr. Chairman, can we allow one of our greatest national treasures to turn to a shambles because of the misguided hand of Congress and the Fish and Wildlife Service? The answer should be a

resounding no. We need to work together to come up with viable solutions for funding to get the refuge system back on track to prosperity. Thank you.

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you, Mr. Brewster. You have had some management issues to deal with at Tishomingo, if I am not mistaken. Do you care to say anything about that this morning?

Mr. BREWSTER. Mr. Chairman, I think we have got the most cooperation right now that we have had any time that I have been in office. Fish and Wildlife has had numerous community meetings in our area. They have had a lot of input from local citizenry. I think things have improved dramatically. I think they obviously are doing a much better job of working with the community than we have had in the past, and I believe things are certainly going in the right direction.

Mr. SAXTON. Very good. I understood that they made some management changes, and perhaps that is—perhaps that is what was needed. I know from my experience with the refuge situation in New Jersey of a similar change made not long ago which paid good dividends as well.

Mr. BREWSTER. Well, they did it right, though. They came down and had their public hearing first before any management changes occurred. They got input from the local citizenry, and I think at that point understood the need for a new director.

Mr. SAXTON. Well, very good. OK, well, thank you for being with us this morning. I appreciate hearing from you. Mr. Farr, did you want to ask a question or two?

Mr. FARR. Just an observation, Mr. Chairman. You pointed out that the Service estimated that the total maintenance backlog of more than $440 million is on the books. Did you have a figure in mind?

Mr. BREWSTER. That is what I used in my more than $400 million. For this year alone, Sam, it is in excess of $60 million, grand total well over $400 million.

Mr. FARR. Well, I can't emphasize enough, and I hope that maybe you can help, I will put together a collaborative effort, bipartisan collaborative effort, next year to earmark Land and Water Conservation Funds. This year Congress appropriated $100 million, and that is for the entire Park Service. That is for emergency spending in the Park Service, Forest Service, National Forest Service, BLM and the refuges. In my district alone in Big Sur coast there are willing sellers of property who have it and want to sell that to the Forest Service because they don't want to see it developed; that alone would eat up the $100 million in a quick second. That is all we have for the entire country for all of these agencies, and yet we have got $900 million in the bank. So we have a source of revenue we could safely work to get a bigger appropriation and solve some of these backlog problems.

Mr. BREWSTER. Well, I think you make a very good point there. That is what the money was initially earmarked for. That is what the fund was created for. I would hope that we could look at taking care of inholdings and taking care of operation and maintenance as opposed to creating large new refuges. Obviously a refuge such as yours may have adjoining land that needs to be acquired. I don't think we can ever say that we are not going to acquire new land.

At the same time, I don't think we need to be jumping out and acquiring a 100-thousand-acre new refuge somewhere that is going to take a lot of money that needs to be going into operation and maintenance at the 510 refuges we have. You know, we have something that other countries would die for in our refuge system, and it is something that we need to make sure that we do a good job taking care of it.

Mr. FARR. Well, it also—this is what people don't think about. It has international implications. You are interested, certainly, in not cutting into the flyways of America to provide essentially safe landing areas—we don't think about that—particularly for migratory fowl, we don't respect international boundary lines, OK, east coming south and so on. So we really need to engage, I think, more of an international respect for the entire waterfowl migratory habits. And I agree with you we have got to take care of the existing refuges first before we acquire new ones. And we ought to also emphasize through our foreign aid and other kinds of tools that we deal with other countries that are important to management of the species that they also put some protection down.

Mr. BREWSTER. I agree. You make some very good points there, Congressman Farr. I think you are aware, too, as I am, that sportsmen's dollars for hunting are a lot of the dollars that have gone into all this from different Robertson funds, et cetera, but without the refuge systems, without, say, partner areas as you mentioned, our migratory waterfowl would certainly not have the opportunities they have. The Central Flyway, we are going to have the largest population this year of any year since 1950 and maybe any year ever. It is a phenomenal return of wildlife, migratory waterfowl. But our refuges and all of our property like that is beneficial not only to the game that I hunt, but also to nongame species, as well. And so therefore it is important to ask them for that, as well.

Mr. FARR. Thank you.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Torkildsen.

Mr. TORKILDSEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't have so much a question as a comment. I just want to commend our colleague for bringing this issue to the forefront. I think Parker River Wildlife Refuge in my district may be small by comparison to other parks in the country. It is well known as a bird sanctuary, but there is a lot of activity that occurs there in addition to that. And clearly, we can't neglect the refuges we have. Obviously while we will want to see some areas protected, let us not neglect those areas that need help right now and circle this for next year; so I would just like to commend our colleague for his efforts in the spirit of bipartisanship, and hopefully we can address this in a way that everyone will say, yes, this is what needs to be done. Thank you.

Mr. BREWSTER. Thank you.

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Brewster. We appreciate you being here this morning, as always. And we are going to move to panel No. 2. Our first witness will be Bob McDowell, who appears today as Secretary-Treasurer of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. I know Bob as the Director of the Fish, Game and Wildlife of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, where he and I have had a long history of coop-

erative efforts with regard to issues of a joint interest. So, Bob, welcome here today. We are glad that you are here. We also haveDr. Rollin Sparrowe, who is the President of the Wildlife Management Institute, and Evan Hirsche, who is the Director of the National Wildlife Refuge Campaign in the National Audubon Society, Jim Waltman, who is Director of the Refuge and Wildlife Program of the Wilderness Society. Welcome aboard.

I would just like to remind you that we do have a 5-minute rule we will be operating under. I understand that some of you may wish to go slightly over that, which is fine, so use the little light in front of you as a guide to know that we appreciate your sticking as close to it as you can. So if you would like to begin, Bob, we are interested to hear from you this morning.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT L. MCDOWELL, SECRETARY-TREASURER, INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES

Mr. MCDOWELL. Thanks so much for having us. Thank you so much for holding this meeting.

I am the Secretary-Treasurer of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and as such I am representing all 50 of our States and our Canadian members and many other interests as they relate to fish and wildlife. We were formed in 1902 and continue a tradition of protecting and influencing the protection of habitats and fish and wildlife resources in this country.

The refuge system is recognized as a jewel not only in this country and other countries. And, it is not only a safe haven, but it also is a place where management occurs, where populations are enhanced in various ways. A high priority, we think, should be given to these areas in terms of maintenance. A lot of pressure is being put on the refuge system in terms of public access and public access in the form of bird watching, wildlife observation in general, photography and conservation education in addition to traditional uses like hunting and fishing.

Land acquisition has been an important thing in our State and other States, and we strongly encourage that these areas be maintained and that the new areas have enough money to provide the facilities necessary to keep them as productive areas for wildlife and also for people.

We would like to encourage appropriate legislation that might change the Land and Water Conservation Fund and other funds to funnel some money into maintenance and operations.

One of the issues that is of major concern to us are the conservation and public use plans for these refuges. And certainly without proper funding planning it is difficult. It is difficult for the States, too, because we cooperate as partners with the fish and wildlife service in developing refuge plans and also plans for State wildlife management areas and other State land acquisition programs. It is difficult to have a partner that can't keep up with some of the things that need to be done, especially in terms of the planning effort. The Association feels strongly that this type of cooperation can enable refuge managers to focus on public Rccess.

Comprehensive conservation plans need to be made in each area, and this must include habitat work for the wildlife, but also infra-

structure needs for public use programs. I think one of the things that needs to be mentioned is that these refuges frequently form a foundation for a local economy based upon nature-based tourism, and especially in our State. If you just look at the Cape May Peninsula, for example, bird watching brings in $6 million a year and the refuge, the new Cape May Refuge, is going to contribute even more if we have the needed facilities there.

In New Jersey, funding shortfalls have limited the ability of refuge managers to improve habitats for the benefit of species which are of mutual concern. Our State biologists serve with the Service on ecosystem teams, and the Service in turn is a very important part and the refuge personnel an important part of our State landscape management project. The Service is fairly hindered in providing much needed facilities and maintenance, and therefore personnel time is taken up in other areas in terms of helping us with our projects.

There are some additional examples, I think, of problems and issues associated throughout the States, and I share a couple of them with you. In Louisiana, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Louisiana cooperated on and collaborated on a wide range of management programs, including sharing heavy equipment to develop fire lines on management areas, sharing tree planting and other specialized equipment to enhance their forest management programs and conducting joint bald eagle surveys and other wildlife surveys, mid-winter waterfowl counts, turkey and deer populations and other things, planting acorns, for example, and seedlings to restore bottom land hardwood forests.

In Louisiana, most disruptions were caused by a shortfall in funds have been related to the inability of the National Wildlife Refuges to replace needed equipment. And that is true in almost every State. For example, in our State we are having to plow snow for the Wallkill Refuge because they have been unable to purchase that kind of equipment.

There are a number of examples of negative impacts and funding shortfalls we have had. For example, in Wisconsin exotic plant management, which can threaten adjacent pieces of property and other Habitats, the control was not going on on these wildlife refuges. In some Wisconsin and New Jersey refuges, lack of personnel results in hunting recreation potential going under-utilized. And are unintended consequence of this is an increase in wildlife populations, for example deer in our State, having negative impacts from refuge deer populations on adjoining lands. And this is true in other States.

In sum, the State fish and wildlife agencies recognize the significant partnerships that have evolved between them and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding the management of fish and wildlife species and their habitats and the provision of high-demand fish and wildlife recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing and birding, have gone unanswered. We encourage the Service to focus its budget requests on operations and maintenance needs so that the Service, in partnership with the State fish and wildlife agencies, can continue to advance conservation in a partnership way throughout the National Wildlife Refuge System. Thanks for sharing this opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Robert McDowell may be found at the end of hearing.]

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you very much. The bells that you hear are a call to vote. We will proceed with Mr. Sparrowe and then take a break and we will vote and come back. So if you would like to proceed, Mr. Sparrowe. Thank you very much.

STATEMENT OF DR. ROLLIN SPARROWE, PRESIDENT, WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

Dr. SPARROWE. I am Rollin Sparrowe, President of the Wildlife Management Institute, speaking broadly about the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement. This Alliance was formed early in 1995 based on the unifying concept that maintenance and management of habitat provided by National Wildlife Refuges and their surroundings is essential to fish and wildlife populations. Our common interest is to help provide resources needed for refuges to function as intended.

Mr. Chairman, we have studied the Fish and Wildlife Service data and met with them repeatedly over the past year and a half and believe that the problem and shortfall is real. Many of us have been on the ground on refuges and seen it in person. You may know that the group produced a video to illustrate this last year. We think this shortage significantly limits both fish and wildlife management and habitat management and the appropriate public uses.

Each of our organizations has a unique relationship with National Wildlife Refuges, and this will be borne out in the testimony that you hear today. Mr. Chairman, I think the record shows clearly that the government has not borne the cost of National Wildlife Refuges alone and there have been some very large contributions from donations of land, outright purchases, and the ongoing work that some of the groups are doing.

CARE members believe in and encourage cost reduction and cost sharing in every way practical. However, the public good cannot be fully served without significant additional Federal dollars being appropriated in the future. The value of the nation's investment in refuges must be protected for future generations.

In my written testimony, I attempted to explain why the Service continues to purchase refuge land and should in many cases. By far, refuge acquisitions are done solely on a willing-seller basis. Cape May National Wildlife Refuge, for example, in New Jersey initially contained more than 250 individual properties and is being acquired gradually as willing sellers are identified. This takes a long time. The Migratory Bird Commission, week before last, bought yet another piece of Bear River National Wildlife Refuge, which was established back in the 1930's. This is an enduring process.

I asked the Fish and Wildlife Service some key questions this week and one of the answers, I think, will be of interest to the subcommittee. Between 1990 and 1995 during five fiscal years, 1.7 million acres were added to the refuge system through purchase, exchange, transfer or donation. Of that total, 134,000 acres, less than 8 percent, were acquired for the 41 new refuges that were newly established between those dates. The remainder of the land

was acquired for refuges and wetland management districts established prior to that 1990 date. So there are legitimate long-term purchases of already existing and established refuges that make up the bulk of the current expenditures for land acquisition. Some new refuges must be added over time on an as-needed basis. This is an investment in the future. We also need to finish refuges that we have started.

CARE members unanimously support preparation of conservation management plans and feel that such plans can provide a blueprint for the Congress and the American people to determine what is wanted in the refuge system and what the cost will be. We are still awaiting a system-wide plan from the Department of Interior.

Finally, this unique Alliance, as you referred to, wishes to suggest a desired future condition for the National Wildlife Refuge System. CARE members can unite behind a system of wildlife refuges that provide important habitats for migratory birds and the recovery of species threatened with extinction; serves as a catalyst for conservation of the nation's diverse array of fish, wildlife and other biota; is widely recognized for scientific excellence in the management of wildlife and habitat; sustains habitats for fish and wildlife that provide exceptional public opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreation; sets a standard of excellence for environmental education; serves as a model for cooperative management with surrounding public and private lands; and finally, is managed as a true system with appropriate staffing and operating funding to fulfill its mission.

We appreciate the attention of this subcommittee to the important issue of management and operation of the refuge system, and we think there is a lot of additional information and factual material about cooperative relationships and current development of refuges that might help the committee in its deliberations. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Rollin Sparrowe may be found at the end of hearing.]

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you very much. We are going to break now and we will be back in 10 minutes or so.

[Recess.]

Mr. SAXTON. With a little luck now, we will have a good period of time we can pursue these matters.

Mr. Hirsche, why don't you proceed to give us your testimony, please.

STATEMENT OF EVAN HIRSCHE, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE CAMPAIGN, NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Mr. HIRSCHE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also would like to thank the subcommittee for this opportunity to testify about the operations and maintenance funding backlogs suffered by the National Wildlife Refuge System. It is an issue of critical importance to the National Audubon Society.

The mission of the National Audubon Society, representing more than 550 Americans nationwide, is to conserve and restore national ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the Earth's biological diversity.

Audubon's history with the National Wildlife Refuge System dates back to 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt established the first wildlife refuge, Pelican Island in Florida, by executive order. Even then, refuges were underfunded. Audubon societies hired wardens to watch over Roosevelt's first wildlife sanctuaries. Today, National Audubon's 518 chapters throughout the country play a pivotal role in many wildlife refuges, assisting with volunteer coordination, public education, citizen science and maintenance projects.

For example, at Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey the Atlantic Audubon Society has recently begun conducting weekly bird surveys after budget cuts forced the termination of the refuge biologist. The group also helps maintain trails, leads tours and conducts an annual refuge clean up.

Audubon views the National Wildlife System as being critical to the survival of migratory bird species. Though mostly comprised of small islands of habitat, many of the 511 refuge units are important to the successful migration of millions of birds that travel along North American flyways. To migratory birds, the refuge system represents a vital network of eating and nesting stops upon which their survival depends.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is one of this country's most remarkable natural assets and is unique among Federal land systems dedicated primarily to the conservation of wildlife. Refuges provide havens for a vast array of wildlife and plant species and serve as a bulwark against further population declines of threatened and endangered species.

The committee has expressed concern that in spite of operations and maintenance funding shortfalls, the Fish and Wildlife Service continues to acquire habitat for refuges. Audubon believes that the loss of habitat is the single most serious threat to this country's diversity of species. As population pressures increase, opportunities to set aside habitat vital to the survival of birds, plants and other wildlife will be lost. It is our view that the unmanaged habitat can always be improved while habitat that is destroyed is rarely recovered.

Audubon fully supports the expansion of the National Wildlife Refuge System and endorses the Fish and Wildlife Service's policy of purchasing land from willing sellers.

In my written testimony, I offer examples of how refuge acquisitions can assist local economies, reduce management costs, and even when managed in a custodial fashion provide important habitat for wildlife. Several strategies have been developed to help remedy the system's operations and maintenance backlog. It has been suggested by some that local volunteers can compensate for the shortage of O&M funding on refuges. Despite volunteer assistance from Audubon chapters and other dedicated organizations and individuals, many of whom are represented here today, volunteer support on refuges cannot be expected to fully supplant many of the more technical aspects of importance operations and maintenance projects such as habitat restoration, species monitoring and facility upkeep.

Opportunities also exist for cost-sharing, and revenue enhancement concepts are being explored. Most recently there has been a

call for expanded entrance and user fee collections on refuges as a way to reduce O&M backlog. The dispersed nature of refuge visitation generally results in high collection costs and low rates of return for fees. Unlike national parks, most wildlife refuges have several access points that go unmonitored, making fee collections more difficult.

In our view, a substantial increase in Federal funding over the short term will help make the refuge system more self sufficient over the long term. By investing in refuges, Congress invests in people and communities.

The Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that 24 million people a year visit refuges for wildlife observation and interpretation. A 1994 report examining the economic impacts of birding at National Wildlife Refuges shows that the average visitor is worth between $21 and $145 to local communities for a total of between $603,000 and $14 million to communities adjacent to the eight refuges surveyed. By investing in habitat and interpretive facilities, we can help to ensure that a greater number of communities across the country benefit from the system environmentally, economically and socially.

The subcommittee has also requested our view of comprehensive management plans. Audubon believes that the comprehensive management planning process is critically important to providing continuity in refuge management over time and provides meaningful public involvement. It ensures that regardless of staff changes and myriad external influences, the refuge will continue on a course that both wildlife managers and the local community determine to be in the best interests of the wildlife.

The National Wildlife Refuge System in its mission, ecological diversity and geographical scope, is like no other system of lands in the world. It is home to more than 1300 species of birds and other wildlife and countless plant species. Fifty-five refuges support a fifth of plants and animals listed as endangered or threatened. It is truly a magnificent asset to the American people. Yet among the U.S. Federal lands systems it receive a scant $2.15 per acre versus the Park Service, which receives $13.28.

The National Audubon Society is committed to finding a solution to the Refuge System's funding difficulties and looks forward to working with the committee and the other member organizations of CARE as we endeavor to reach this goal. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Evan Hirsche may be found at the end of hearing.]

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Hirsche. We will bring on Mr. Waltman. If you will proceed, sir.

STATEMENT OF JAMES WALTMAN, DIRECTOR, REFUGES AND WILDLIFE PROGRAM, THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

Mr. WALTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the 315,000 members of the Wilderness Society. Defenders of Wildlife has also asked that they be associated with this testimony.

Personally, I would also like to thanky you, Mr. Chairman, for your support over the years for the Forsythe Refuge, and I would

like to thank Mr. Pallone for his support as well. Growing up in New Jersey, Brigantine was the first refuge I ever had the opportunity to visit and I have been back many times since.

The wilderness Society is proud to be a member of CARE. We also strongly support the earlier testimony of Dr. Sparrowe.

I would like to focus my testimony on how the Refuge System can and does play a remarkable role in conserving endangered and threatened species. This subcommittee and the Congress have reviewed the Endangered Species Act for many years now. Hopefully we will get something done next Congress on the ESA, but we should look at the Refuge System as a real opportunity to do more for endangered species.

Long before there was an Endangered Species Act, the Refuge System was there protecting endangered species. In fact, you could say that for Teddy Roosevelt, the Refuge System was the Endangered Species Act. It was his Endangered Species Act. And the refuges he established under executive authority were done to save birds and mammals that were close to extinction at the time—or thought to be so, the gulls, the terns, the herons, the egrets and some of the big game species as well.

Later on in the 1930's and 40's we had a slightly different concern. It was the waterfowl at that time. There were the same kind of concerns with losing entire species of waterfowl. So in a sense, that was the endangered species issue of the day, and the Refuge System was there again to tackle that problem.

The Refuge System continues to make a terrific contribution to endangered species today. How do we know that? Well, if you look at the endangered species that occur on National Wildlife Refuges, 55 percent of those species are improving or they have at least stabilized. If you look at species that don't occur on refuges, only 32 percent are improving or are stabilized. And for those species that have a refuge established specifically for them, 68 percent of those species are improving or have at least stabilized. And I think that is a pretty good indication of success.

There are many examples of success. The piping plovers are rebounding on the Atlantic Coast, thanks to the Forsythe Refuge in New Jersey, Parker River Refuge in Massachusetts, Chincoteague in Virginia and other refuges. Aleutian Canada geese are coming back thanks to refuges in the Central Valley in California. And the Delmarva peninsula fox squirrel is coming back thanks to Blackwater Refuge in Maryland and Chincoteague in Virginia.

But unfortunately, as you have heard time and time again, the Refuge System is struggling for its very survival. One of the things that troubles us the most is the fact that nearly a third of the refuges aren't even staffed or they have very little staff present. And in addition, there are 250 or so formerly filled positions that are now vacant. And included among that is the refuge manager's position at the Cape May National Wildlife Refuge. They had a full refuge manager's position which has been unfortunately eliminated or complexed with Forsythe, so they now share a refuge manager position.

Management programs to recover endangered and threatened species have been left unaccomplished on a lot of refuges, and the Fish and Wildlife Service counts about $60 million in maintenance

and operations projects needs specifically for endangered species projects. This Committee has heard a lot about the golden-cheeked warbler in Texas. That is an endangered bird, that is highly controversial. Well, we have had a refuge down there, the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, established for that endangered bird and others, but we aren't getting the resources we need to do the habitat assessments and the management of that refuge to make sure that that contribution is there to compliment the habitat conservation plan. You have also heard about the red-cockaded woodpecker, another highly controversial endangered species. And there are at least a half a dozen refuges with red-cockaded woodpecker programs, but they need more funding to be fully implemented.

We know there is a big problem with the operations budget, but by no means should we succumb to the arguments that we should stop buying land. It is just, if you will, similar to saying that an underfunded school system should stop accepting new students. We can't do that. The mission of the Refuge System is to protect wildlife. It needs to expand accordingly just as schools need to expand if they are to meet their mission of teaching our children.

One example I wanted to leave you with on why continuing refuge land acquisition is so critical, is the Key Deer National Wildlife Refuge in Florida. Again, here is an endangered species refuge. The problem is that it is an incomplete refuge and they need to finish buying land. Every acre they don't buy down there will probably turn into another house, which will probably turn into more cars, pizza delivery boys and other traffic in the refuge. The biggest threat that those endangered deer face is auto collisions. If we don't finish buying that refuge, we are going to have more deer kills, more of the staff time spent chasing after the pizza delivery boy who is driving too fast through the refuge, and less time is then available for habitat management. We have got to complete that refuge and many others, and we also have to keep expanding and acquiring new refuges where that is appropriate.

My written testimony has a number of examples inNew Jersey and other States of great opportunities that we could meet if we had adequate funding.

The last thing I would like to say is that we appreciate that the administration requested a modest funding increase for the Refuge System. By no means will it fix the big problem out there, but we certainly hope that the Congress will support at least that much in the fiscal year 1997 appropriations bill. We have been pleased so far that Congress has at least tentatively supported most of that proposed increase. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of James Waltman may be found at the end of hearing.]

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you all very much for your testimony. Let me just explore this issue of financial perspective here for just a minute. I think we all agree, nobody disagrees, that the systen, the Refuge System, is desirable, that it performs a very worthwhile purpose. We all agree with all that. We all agree that we would like to have more refuge land for all the reasons that you have all pointed out. The question comes down to how do we maintain it,

how do we operate it efficiently and how much money does it take to do that and then where do we get it.

In my opening statement I mentioned a figure of a shortfall of $440 million. The first question is what are your individual thoughts on what kind of money we need. That was my thought. What is yours, Bob?

Mr. McDOWELL. Well, I tend to believe what the Service has said about their needs, and I think we need to develop a plan for future needs. We know where we are as far as backlog is concerned. What we need to keep this thing going and expanding opportunities, I think that is another number the Service is going to have to come up with. I do think, though, that the Service ought to look at the way States manage their lands. You know, in our State we manage land at a lower cost figure, I think, per unit than the Refuge System does. Now, they have a different set of regulations and rules about what they have to do, but we certainly have just as much wildlife and less personnel.

Mr. SAXTON. Dr. Sparrowe, do you have any idea on how much it takes to fund this operation and maintenance account properly?

Dr. SPARROWE. Well, I heard the testimony at the July hearing and really can't offer anything to counter what the Fish and Wildlife Service said. I think we are looking at a substantial amount, much more than currently is being added. One of the pieces of advice we tried to give Interior and Fish and Wildlife Service as a group was that with the money that may be coming this year and next year if some modest amounts are added, we need to do a better job of showing the Congress exactly where that money goes and what it does, because O&M is always difficult to justify when there are other priorities.

Mr. SAXTON. We have got to get a target. I am going to talk to the appropriators and they are going to ask, well, we have an allocation for the budget and that is how much money you need to spend under the budget allocation, Mr. Saxton, how much money do you need to do this job? I have got to know.

Mr. Hirsche, do you have any idea what that number is?

Mr. HIRSCHE. I don't have that specific number, sir. I would say that we can obtain that, obviously, from the Fish and Wildlife Service and get that forwarded to you. I would say that the number that they have thrown out really brings us to a minimum funding level and anything that is additive, I would echo Mr. McDowell on this point, is not going to be considered in that figure.

Mr. SAXTON. Keep in mind that if the Republicans are fortunate enough to maintain control of the Congress next year, we are going to have to have some independent kind of figure that I can deal with. You know, I am willing to do this. I am willing to go to bat on this issue, but I can't go there with an empty bag and say golly, gee, fill it up.

Mr. McDOWELL. I will volunteer the International staff to work with you, Mr. Chairman, and we will come up with a needs assessment for the Refuge System. We will come up with a number. I am sure our friends in the Wildlife Management Institute will help us.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Waltman, did you want to add anything?

Mr. WALTMAN. Well, the only thing I want to add is I think it is important to try to break the problem into its component parts.

One of them is inadequate staffing. The Service told me that they have some 250 positions that used to be filled that are now laying vacant. So we should be able to figure out what the cost would be to fill those positions and others that are necessary, then look at the infrastructure problems.

I did want to add another point, though. We are looking at a Refuge System that is getting—hopefully this year we will get about $180 million to be appropriated to the Refuge System. The administration's requested increase for the Park Service easily outdistanced the entire existing budget for the Refuge System. Now we also support the parks, too, but I think it gives you an idea of the relative scale. We are not talking about as huge a problem as we are in some of the other areas of government. And this one ought to be one that we can tackle easily.

Mr. SAXTON. Now let me pursue one matter further. The Land and Water Conservation Fund is a fund which is set aside for the acquisition of new refuge lands, is that—do we all understand that correctly? Mr. McDowell, I think, suggested that perhaps we ought to look at an amendment to the law to permit the use of that money for acquisition as well as operation and maintenance. Do the rest of you have any thoughts on that?

Mr. WALTMAN. I would only say that the first thing we need to do is make sure that the full amount is appropriated. So I guess I would be wary of any consideration of using the funds for different purposes if it is just going to split up a small pie into more parts. So I think we can think about that, but the goal should be to make sure that that dedicated fund gets appropriated as Congress intended it.

Mr. SAXTON. For acquisition?

Mr. WALTMAN. Well, let us get the money—let us make sure we are going to get the money out of the bank that is in the bank and we can talk about how to spend it. Our historical position has been that it should be spent on acquisition. I think we are more concerned about ensuring that the money gets appropriated at this point than being real hard line on how the money gets spent. But for now, we think it should go for acquisition at the pretty low amounts that are being appropriated.

Mr. SAXTON. Mr. Hirsche.

Mr. HIRSCHE. Yes, Audubon would certainly fall into that same category. Since the creation of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the amount allocated has been a fraction of what ought to be there. We are talking about $10 billion that should have been allocated by now for land acquisition, but just a fraction of that has been actually applied. So I would certainly second Mr. Waltman's view that we don't want to talk about breaking up an already small pie until we get that full allocation and then we can start considering this possibility. But for now we would encourage only Land and Water Conservation Funds being dedicated to an acquisition.

Mr. SAXTON. Dr. Sparrowe, did you have anything to add?

Dr. SPARROWE. Well, there has always been confusion about what is really available under Land and Water. There were expectations decades ago that have not been met, and I think we have to have that clarified before we know what pie we were talking about cutting up. That is the difficulty.

Mr. SAXTON. Well, I look forward to working with all of you to make this a priority. As I said at the previous hearing, I think it is important that we together identify a target or series of targets and we all then take aim at the same target. So I look forward to working with you, perhaps outside of the hearing process, to try to come up with some numbers that we can have as common goals. Thank you very much for being here with us today. We appreciate your testimony. As always, it has been very valuable and informative, and thank you very much for coming.

We will now go to our third and final panel. It is a pleasure to welcome back a former colleague and my friend, Congressman Ron Marlenee, who is now Director of Legislative Affairs for Safari Club International. Ron, welcome to you. Also Ms. Susan Lamson, who is Director, Division of Conservation, Wildlife and National Resources of the National Rifle Association: and Mr. Bill Horn, who is the Director of the National and International Affairs, Wildlife Legislative Fund of America. Welcome aboard, everybody. We are glad you are here, and we will begin with Ron Marlenee.

STATEMENT OF RON MARLENEE, DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS, SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL

Mr. MARLENEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and it is nice to be back in front of the subcommittee, even if it is on this side. So it is a pleasure to be here with all of the people in this room.

The first question you as subcommittee members may want to ask the panel is do you support the National Wildlife Refuge System. And on behalf of the SCI I want to say the answer is a resounding yes. In fact, we are members of the CARE group and with some conditions that I will add in my testimony support the statement of principles that was put forth by Rollin Sparrowe.

Safari Club is proud, very proud, of its contribution to conservation and the Refuge System. Just recently SCI assisted in the transfer of significant private holdings into the Kodiak Refuge in Alaska. Sportsmen and women, as you know, Mr. Chairman, provide 75 percent of every dollar spent on wildlife.

The supporters of the system included Theodore Roosevelt, one of the most prominent sportsmen of all times, who established the Refuge System, and John Audubon, the founder of the Audubon Society. Both of these great Americans envisioned a system that would be a wellspring, a cornucopia that would be available for a number of uses. Did they envision it as a sanctuary locked up with people locked out? Of course not. Audubon was a conservationist and a researcher and both of them were hunters. They wanted a broad use but were concerned, emphasizing concerned, about the commercial exploitation of wildlife and/or habitat.

We as Safari Club members share that concern. Sportsmen have turned over the family jewels to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, jewels that were paid for by sacrifice and which they hoped they could enjoy for generations. We put our faith and trust in an agency that is now pleading poverty. The 1995 backlog is reported to have been $386 million. The 1996 backlog is now $440 million. As an investor, we have to ask what would cause an acceleration of $60 million in 1 year in O&M when O&M had been identified a year ago as a problem and management could have at least sta-

bilized that problem. Was it the fact that the system was acquiring more and more property, acquiring property at a rate so fast that it jeopardized all of its holdings?

I farm and ranch and have a neighbor who never saw a piece of ground that he didn't like. In his effort to control more and more land, he bought, and when he couldn't buy or beg, borrow or steal money—beg or borrow the capital to buy, he leased and he leased some more land. The fact that upkeep and management of this land cost him big money escaped him. He soon filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. And when you file for bankruptcy, Mr. Chairman, the creditors stop providing capital and worse yet the investors in the system stop investing.

Sportsmen were recently threatened with exclusion from the refuge involvement because of lack of funds. Let me say this, that when sportsmen are precluded from legitimate refuge management because of the excuse that there is no money to manage the activities of sportsmen, you may be sure the biggest investor in wildlife and habitat will seek other alternative means to contribute to conservation.

Mr. Chairman and subcommittee members, I commend you for initiating the beginning of what I would hope would be a series of meetings. Get out into the field and ask the neighbors about the management practices. The neighbors often know more than you do about your own business, whether you live in town or in the country. Ask those who use the refuge about U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service attitudes. Ask the State wildlife agencies and neighboring Federal agencies about the cooperation they get from the Service. Inside the Beltway, Mr. Chairman, it is easy to solve a problem, and I know from experience, by throwing money at it. Out in the real world, we have to solve our financial problems by establishing priorities.

It has been indicated that 24,600 miles of fence and signing is essential. At $3,000 per mile, Mr. Chairman, that is a tidy sum of $75 million. What kind of signing do they desire. On the million acre CMR, the refuge manager insisted on erecting a sign at every fork of wheel tracks in the grass. These were not roads, merely wheel tracks in the grass, thousands of dollars spent by the bureaucrats so they could spend more money on trail maps. Was this essential? Did it contribute to the esthetics or to wildlife? Ask yourself, Mr. Chairman, if a six foot, 4x4 white post scattered all over the refuge at wheel track forks in the road contributed to wildlife or the esthetics.

The establishment of priorities is absolutely essential. Not only within the Service, but in the whole of the Interior Department. It appears the more glitzy politically correct projects bring revenue, and good management is ignored. Is the Department a good steward when they acquire more and more land, plead poverty and close out uses that have been traditionally the underpinnings of this system? Of course not.

I would like to cite one case for you, Mr. Chairman, the Arizona case. Ten years ago, the Service should have been aware of a pending problem with O&M. In spite of that, in 1985 the Service acquired 21,258 acres of private land and grazing rights called the Buenos Aires Ranch. The purpose was to reintroduce the masked

bobwhite quail. Ten years later, the Service has expanded its holdings to 120,000 acres spread over 190 square miles. 26,000 chicks have been released. Reintroduction has failed. It is estimated that of the 31 coveys recorded in 1991, less than 300 birds remain today. Quoting from an independent study, the cost for existing birds—this is from an independent study—is $31,000 per bird.

Sportsmen have been supportive across the Nation in establishing water holes and reestablishing wildlife populations. In spite of this, this study, which I would provide for you for the record, has stated that a very large area of the refuge, the Buenos Aires Ranch, has been or is proposed to be closed to all hunting. It has been alleged that the refuge manager is trying to set aside the refuge as a non-hunting preserve.

What do you do when the mission fails—this is my point, Mr. Chairman—and the cost of O&M of 190 square miles of failed mission refuge area are eating you alive? Change missions and acquire more property for bobwhite to protecting Sonora grassland to saving riparian habitat. However, changing missions doesn't change O&M and may in fact increase the cost.

Does SCI support increased funding to cover O&M? The answer is we support accountability first, prioritizing needs second, spending third. To proceed otherwise only invites a reoccurrence of the present problems.

To summarize, we urge a series of field hearings to evaluate management practices that impact O&M. As we stated earlier, get out there and ask your neighbors. Two, we urge this subcommittee to initiate GAO to establish how much of the shortfall was due to the expansion of land under the control of the Service. Three, we urge the subcommittee to examine the priorities that the Service and the Department places on items on the budget. Are signs and fences and visitor centers more important than waterways and hatcheries? Four, has the Service through the Administration budget process requested enough money to keep up and fund O&M, or were their priorities elsewhere? Five, to be fair to the Service, how have the past legislative demands by this Committee of Resources or by Congress contributed to the O&M shortfall?

If sportsmen's funds are used to make up the shortfall, what assurances do we have that sportsmen and women will continue to use the refuge? In short, we would prefer the passage of the National Wildlife Refuge Management Improvement Act before we make an unequivocal commitment to funding and assistance both from within or without the tax base system.

Given the above stipulations, SCI supports the developing of a formula where we all work together to resolve the problem of the O&M shortfall. We also want to go on record as stating that Refuge System and a majority, and I emphasize majority, of its personnel have made a tremendous contribution to a better America.

Mr. Chairman, as I stated at the beginning of my testimony, we are a member of CARE group, and as conditioned by our statement, SCI endorses the following CARE group goals, which I submit for the record and whichRollin Sparrowe has already submitted.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Ron Marlenee may be found at the end of hearing.]

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Marlenee. We appreciate your testimony and we took note of your specific recommendations in particular. Ms. Susan Lamson, please proceed.

STATEMENT OF SUSAN LAMSON, DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND NATURAL RESOURCES, NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

Ms. LAMSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The NRA is pleased to be here today to offer our support to the National Wildlife Refuge System. We represent over 2 million of America's hunters, a group that cares very deeply about the health of our Refuge System. We joined the CARE group in order to lend assistance in finding avenues to relieve the current operation and maintenance backlog plaguing the System.

From the Central Valley of California to the salt water marshes along Brigantine Bay, the hunting community has a very special relationship with the Refuge System. Whether it is participating in a hunting program, providing volunteer help on habitat restoration projects or spending time with family enjoying wildlife, America's hunters know and fully appreciate what the Refuge System offers. We know that in many places it is an oasis of wildlife lands in a desert of constantly diminishing habitat.

Hunters know that refuges provide outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation at a time when access for hunting and other wildlife related activities is becoming more difficult to find, and hunters know that for more than half a century millions of their dollars have been invested toward the betterment of all wildlife and all of America's citizens.

And that is why America's hunters are concerned. We are concerned that our wildlife and the recreational opportunities which allow ourselves and our fellow citizens to enjoy the splendid resource are likely to suffer because of the funding backlog that casts a shadow over the future health of the System. And we are concerned that our investments in the Refuge System, both in time and money, are not getting the return they should. The NRA is confident that all of us want to ensure that these investments are protected. We are not talking about a few buildings in need of a fresh coat of paint. We are talking about refuges that don't have enough money to plant forage crops for migratory waterfowl, refuges that can't repair or replace water management facilities, refuges that in essence cannot fulfill their mission of protecting habitat for fish and wildlife resources.

Knowing this, all of us need to work together to find solutions that can be put into place as quickly as possible. The participants in CARE have discussed many ideas, all of which recognize that our ultimate goal is to maintain the Refuge System's overriding mission of protecting these resources.

Mr. Chairman, in answer to your questions posed in your letter of invitation, the NRA supports efforts by the Fish and Wildlife Service to limit acquisition to the protection of lands that are critical to national priorities or that provide management efficiencies. We wholeheartedly support the need for each refuge to develop a

comprehensive plan which would prioritize refuge activities and expenditures. However, knowing that the O&M backlog has already eclipsed the $400 million mark, the NRA does not want to see a situation in which limited conservation dollars are stretched to the breaking point, possibly leading to an unending merry-go-round in which planning for conservation becomes an end to itself.

Our commitment to the Refuge System extends beyond our participation in the CARE group. Independently the NRA has contributed time and resources to assisting individual refuge units with specific needs. This direct involvement includes contributions of thousands of dollars during the past 2 years to refuges for land acquisition, habitat improvement and access for the disabled. We are confident that one of the avenues available to help reduce the O&M deficit is the encouragement and development of greater partnerships between the Service and private organizations like the NRA.

In fact, one idea that has been discussed within CARE is setting aside a portion of increased O&M funding as a challenge grant program. Under this idea, limited Federal dollars would be matched with private sector dollars, thereby expanding the impact of Congressional appropriations while at the same time fostering greater partnerships for the Refuge System.

We will continue our efforts, pulling together the collective will of our membership, assisting other conservation organizations and working with the Congress to ensure that the health and viability of the Refuge System is not only maintained but is improved upon. Generations of Americans stand before us and we owe it to them to take the initiative now to reduce this funding crisis. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Susan Lamson may be found at the end of hearing.]

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you very much, Susan. Go ahead, Bill.

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM HORN, DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, WILDLIFE LEGISLATIVE FUND OF AMERICA

Mr. HORN. Thank you, sir. Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Wildlife Legislative Fund of America, we thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and we appreciate your continued interest and commitment to the Refuge System, the leadership you have demonstrated. And especially, your leadership in the House passage of H.R. 1675 is also deeply appreciated.

On behalf of over 1–1/2 million sportsmen and sportswomen, the WLFA is committed to conservation of our unparalleled Refuge System and maintaining appropriate outdoor activities, including traditional sportsmen's activities such as hunting and fishing on these public lands. We are also pleased to be a member of CARE and the chance to work cooperatively with organizations with which on many other issues we are often at odds. It is nice to work together and find common ground.

Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, as prior witnesses have stated, operations and maintenance, especially maintenance, have been underfunded for the Refuge System in recent years. And other programs such as land acquisition and Endangered Species Act administration have become more appealing to recent administrations

and Congress, attracting a greater percentage of the FWS budget. It seems that maintenance has limited "sex appeal" and becomes a target of reductions. These reductions have begun to take their toll and are now adversely affecting this wonderful system.

This unfortunate situation was not always the case. I know that during my tenure as Assistant Secretary of Interior, in 1985 we initiated in the Fish and Wildlife Service a maintenance management program, designed to identify and systematically manage refuge maintenance requirements. It was designed to ensure that every penny was appropriated for the direct benefit of the Refuge System. And to a large extent that program was a success. Indeed, that system is what enables the Service today to identify and provide the cost estimates of the refuge maintenance backlog.

At the same time in 1985, we launched the Accelerated Refuge Maintenance program known as ARM. Its purpose was to increase earmarked funding for refuge maintenance to try to catch up with and eliminate the backlog of maintenance that we had identified in the mid 1980's. And in fiscal years 1986, 1987 and 1988, it successfully steered extra funding to refuge maintenance. Unfortunately, as time passed, the Bush and Clinton administrations shelved the ARM program and dollars just drifted away.

I would like to now offer some specific suggestions to address this issue. We realize that money is tight and government programs of all kinds are being downsized and closed. However, we believe that some viable options exist to help raise money for a new ARM-type program, to basically restart it. Since 1986, authorization has been in place to allow the Service to charge entrance fees, entrance fees that could directly benefit the system as these dollars are available to the Service without appropriation.

The Service, unfortunately, has been less than aggressive in employing this authority. We think, No. 1, that attitude needs to change. Second, Congress can address changing the disposition of these fees so that more dollars go to refuge operations. Presently 70 percent of entrance fee proceeds are earmarked for land acquisition through the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund. Only 30 percent are earmarked for the refuge O&M account. WLFA supports a change in this formula, and we understand that the Service and the administration are also willing to entertain a change, something that you all can deal with directly.

The sporting community is also willing to provide additional funds via extra user fees and charges on hunters and anglers if we are assured that these moneys will be dedicated directly to the refuges. And we look forward to working with FWS and the Congress regarding those types of fees. We are willing to pay more.

Still, we are persuaded that Congress must appropriate additional funds for operations and maintenance of the Refuge System. And per your questions to previous witnesses, we would suggest that the Congress entertain a four or 5-year commitment of something in the $50 to $60 million a year to basically put a big, heavy dent in this maintenance backlog, to essentially have a new ARM program of that magnitude. We think that would be one hell of a head start in catching up. The Refuge System is the dominant program within the Service and deserves appropriate funding.

Let me add four other observations in closing regarding these financial management issues. We think that Congress needs to resist the temptation to add money to the Fish and Wildlife Service construction budget and start building expensive visitor facilities and the like that create new maintenance obligations and exacerbate the existing maintenance backlog. A lot of money seems to flow into the construction account for these types of things, and we think to catch up with the backlog Congress needs to resist that temptation.

Second, Fish and Wildlife Service should aggressively pursue for refuge units cooperative management agreements with State fish and wildlife agencies as a way to reduce Federal operational costs and free up some of those dollars, again for catching up with the maintenance backlog.

Third, we believe that there needs to be a full-scale effort among our community to build public support for the Refuge System commensurate with that enjoyed by the National Park System so that the refuges can effectively compete for the public tax dollars. That, incidentally, is one of the reasons that we strongly support the enactment of H.R. 1675.

And fourth and last, let us not pin any hopes on the Land and Water Conservation Fund. I think as the subcommittee knows, there is no fund per se. It is more like a Visa card line of authorization, credit, and there is no pot of unappropriated money waiting allocation or appropriation. For our community to count on LWCF as a way to solve this problem is an absolute illusion and we must not mislead ourselves.

The Wildlife Refuge System is a great national heritage that now lacks the revenues it needs to conserve and maintain its wonderful values. And we hope that this hearing and your leadership in working with the community will help us all correct this situation. Thank you.

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you very much. Let me just ask a few questions if I may. Bill, you mentioned a figure of $50 or $60 million a year, and I was—I noticed in particular Ron Marlenee talked about finding efficiencies and finding better ways to manage the system which will help to alleviate this operations and management problem. Do you concur that there is room to find better ways to do things? If so, what are those? Mention some.

Mr. HORN. Well, as I said, I think the notion of cooperative management agreements with certain refuge complexes and facilities is a great idea. Some of the States have demonstrated that they have got pretty good on-the-ground efficiencies, and in situations where we have got State units nearby with Federal units, it may make great sense to see if we can work out cooperative deals to let a State agency provide the on-the-ground personnel to essentially manage the Federal unit under cooperative management agreements and following, of course, Federal standards. That is a provision that was in H.R. 1675. I see that as one immediate means of working with the States as a way to reduce some Federal operational costs.

As I said, I think one of the other aspects is that one source of the maintenance backlog has been emplasis on new construction. There are a lot of people who like to build visitor facilities and put these things in some of the newer units. I think while we are fac-

ing this kind of maintenance backlog we would respectfully ask Congress to exercise a little discipline in the construction budget and try to keep some of those dollars over on the maintenance side.

Those are a couple specifics that I can offer right off the top of my head.

Mr. SAXTON. Anything to add, Ms. Lamson or Mr. Marlenee?

Ms. LAMSON. The only thing I might want to add is that in going back to Bill's comment about $60 million at least putting a dent into this, and I think that that can be done right up front. I would like to have the Service provide your subcommittee with a list of maybe the most critical needs within the System, because aside from what may be done in terms of efficiencies, there is obviously a series of needs that are critical that we should be able to move forward with to address and at the same time then look to—in fact, I think the ideas that Ron put forward are very valuable in terms of taking a look at what is going on in the System in terms of where money is asked by the refuges, whether that is necessary as we are facing this enormous backlog. I think there is a lot of evaluation that needs to go on that I think the subcommittee can provide leadership on.

Mr. SAXTON. Does CARE come to consensus on issues? Do you have a way of having—do you speak with one voice or are you kind of members of a loose federation that come together to discuss issues and then form your own opinions after the discussions? How do you work?

Ms. LAMSON. It is a loose federation, but it is based on consensus. And when we do speak as a CARE group, we speak with the consensus of all the members. If there is disagreement or if individual members want to pursue a course separate from the CARE group, they will proceed to do so. Even several of the organizations within CARE may get together on a particular position, but they don't carry the banner of CARE.

Mr. SAXTON. Do you relate well, interrelate well with Fish and Wildlife Service?

Ms. LAMSON. Yes, I believe that each organization has a good rapport with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Mr. SAXTON. Does Fish and Wildlife Service listen?

Ms. LAMSON. I think that there needs to be a unified effort by Congress, by all organizations, by the Service itself in really taking a look at the management of the System in terms of operation and maintenance. As Bill pointed out in terms of the construction budget, you are dealing with what the administration may recommend, what the Congress may do, when what the Service sees is its own needs. And I think that part of CARE's role is to help to develop a working relationship with organizations like ourselves within CARE and the Congress and the Fish and Wildlife Service. I think there probably needs to be an impetus from the outside to have maybe a more thoughtful approach on how to address these issues.

Mr. HORN. Mr. Chairman, if I may, I think that our communications and relationships with the Fish and Wildlife Service itself are excellent. I think part of the problems are when you get up at the more senior levels of the Department, it has been our experience that, frankly, I think Fish and Wildlife Service has been something of a stepchild. One of the previous witnesses noted that the pro-

posed funding increase for the Park Service outstripped the entire budget for the Refuge System. And it has been one of our continuing critiques that too many other programs seem to take too much priority within the Department per se. And as I said, Fish and Wildlife Service has been sort of treated as the stepchild in the operation. So more of our problems, at least in my opinion, are at the more senior level of the administration, not within the Service itself.

Mr. SAXTON. Well, thank you very much. I have no further questions at this time unless you have something there, Mr. Marlenee.

Mr. MARLENEE. With regard to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, it would seem to me that accessing that fund for O&M is an easy way out and does not force Congress, does not force the Agency or these groups that are sitting here to examine and face up, evaluate the real problem of what has caused this. And that was the text of my testimony, is let us see what got us to this point, let us make a very careful analysis and evaluation. And I would be opposed to using the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Our organization would be opposed until we have a thorough examination. I would say that using that fund would be breaking faith with all of those who supported the establishment of that fund, Members of Congress, sportsmen, those who have contributed to that fund.

And in closing, I would once again, because of my experience, urge you to at least make a couple forays out into the hinterlands, out to the districts, and have a hearing and invite the neighbors in, because during my tenure there was a lot of comments that came to my office about the ridiculous practices that were taking place on the refuge. As I said, the neighbors are engaged in management somewhat similar to what the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is doing and when they look at the waste of money they just shake their heads. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SAXTON. Thank you all for your very helpful testimony this morning. We appreciate your perspectives, particularly as you represent, I guess you could say, user groups, people who are interested in the Refuge System who are obviously outside of government. Thank you very much for sharing those perspectives with us. I look forward to working with you on the issue. The hearing is adjourned.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Don Young follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. DON YOUNG

Mr. Chairman, I want to compliment you for scheduling this second day of oversight hearings on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's huge operations and maintenance backlog at our National Wildlife Refuge System.

At our first hearing on July 25, the Assistant Director for Refuges and Wildlife testified that the Refuge backlog had now grown to $290 million in operations and $150 million in construction projects. In fact, the Assistant Director candidly stated that "if we were a modern business, we would be well down the road to bankruptcy". While the Assistant Director testified that the Service has a six-part strategy to "forestall complete collapse of the System", none of the details of that strategy were revealed. I am deeply concerned that unless immediate steps are taken, the infrastructure of the Refuge System will continue to seriously deteriorate.

In response to this growing concern, the House has approved a provision in the Interior Appropriations bill that provides an additional $9 million in FY '97 to reduce the operations and maintenance backlog. While this money alone will not

eliminate the problem, it is a step in the right direction and it will provide tangible benefits to the millions of Americans who enjoy visiting our wildlife refuges.

Finally, I am looking forward to hearing from representatives of the CARE group (Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement) and our other witnesses on how we can effectively deal with the increasing shortfall in funding for our Nation's 510 wildlife refuge units.

[Whereupon, at 11:25 a.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned; and the following was submitted for the record:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROBERT L. MCDOWELL

TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, AND OCEANS ON
OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM
BY ROBERT L. MCDOWELL
THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES
SEPTEMBER 19, 1996

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Bob McDowell and I am the Secretary-Treasurer of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, which represents all fifty State fish and wildlife agencies. We appreciate the opportunity to share with you our perspectives on the need for prioritization of appropriated funds for operations and maintenance, the utility of Refuge conservation and public access plans, and other funding issues for National Wildlife Refuges.

The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, founded in 1902, is a quasi-governmental organization of public agencies charged with the protection and management of North America's fish and wildlife resources. The Association's governmental members include fish and wildlife agencies of the states, provinces and federal governments of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. All 50 states are members. The Association has been a key organization in promoting sound resource management and strengthening federal, state, and private cooperation in protecting and managing fish and wildlife and their habitats in the public interest.

The Association believes that in spite of some problems, the National Wildlife Refuge System is a success story of which we can all be proud. Specifically, the Association recognizes the problems caused by a shortfall in Operations and Maintenance funding and has consistently supported (and will continue to support) an increase in the funding requested and appropriated for operation and maintenance of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Upkeep activities addressing the critical needs of the refuge system are vitally important. High priority should be given to maintaining refuge operations at a level that adequately conserves fish and wildlife populations and their habitats and provides for fish and wildlife dependent recreational uses, such as fishing, hunting, birdwatching and conservation education.

The Association also recognizes and supports high priority land acquisition for National Wildlife Refuges for the purpose of protecting nationally important wetlands and other and fish and wildlife habitat for conservation and public use and enjoyment. However, in years of continued budget shortfall and underfunding of the operations and maintenance of existing refuges, we strongly encourage that operations and maintenance funding keep pace with land acquisition funding. The Fish and Wildlife Service's recent budget moves in this direction and we encourage the Service to continue to place a high priority in their budget request on operations and maintenance needs.

The Association further encourages Congress to consider appropriate changes in legislation to permit funding of operations and maintenance requirements from the Land and Water

Conservation Fund. This would allow the Fish and Wildlife Service to focus some of these funds on addressing critical operations and maintenance needs, in addition to Refuge land acquisition.

Turning to conservation plans, the Association agrees that individual Refuge conservation plans are necessary to ensure comprehensive fish and wildlife management on these Refuges. National Wildlife Refuges are important components of the ecosystem in which they are found. It is vital to consider the role of National Wildlife Refuges and their relationship with adjacent private and state lands when determining how to meet conservation objectives for both the refuge and the ecosystem in which it is found. Refuge plans, with appropriate public involvement, can detail this role, and map out the FWS efforts to meet resource and habitat conservation objectives and fish and wildlife dependent public use goals.

We recognize that drafting, reviewing and completing comprehensive conservation plans for individual refuges is a time consuming task, and we feel strongly that plan development should not be done at the expense of meeting habitat and resource management objectives and appropriate public use programs. Cooperation and coordination with the State fish and wildlife agencies, most of which have developed statewide, comprehensive fish and wildlife resource and habitat conservation plans (including fish and wildlife dependent use needs), is thus vital to completing Refuge conservation plans and to meeting these fish and wildlife objectives. The Association feels strongly that this type of cooperation can enable the refuge manager to provide for focused, comprehensive conservation plans on each refuge, with public participation and involvement, without compromising the ability to meet high priority management needs, including habitat work, vital infrastructure needs, and appropriate public use programs.

On a related note, Mr. Chairman, we believe that it is critical for the USFWS to request full funding levels for the Refuge Revenue Sharing Fund. These funds are used to offset the loss of tax revenues to State and local governments. Full funding will ease financial burdens on counties containing refuges, seems to be a common sense component of the good -neighbor policy, and will continue to return benefits to the FWS from community support for Refuge operations (and appropriate expansion).

Finally, I would like to emphasize the success of the partnerships between individual National Wildlife Refuges and state fish and wildlife agencies. There are numerous examples across the country of wildlife management and habitat protection and restorations programs that would not be possible without cooperation on the state and federal levels. The funding shortfalls have stretched these partnership ventures thin in a number of states and I would like to provide several examples.

In New Jersey, funding shortfalls have limited the ability of Refuge managers to improve habitats for the benefit of species of concern and to provide outdoor recreational opportunities which are at a premium in a densely populated state like ours. Our state agency biologists cooperate actively in the Service's "ecosystem teams" and the Fish and Wildlife Service is an important component of the State's 'landscape management" programs. Both of the above broad approaches to fish and wildlife conservation are designed to establish partnerships to manage

species across agency lines. Without sufficient funding, the Service is hampered in carrying out one of its principle responsibilities, that of protecting and improving habitats under its administration.

The Service is also hindered in providing much needed facilities for fish and wildlife-associated recreation. Trails, observation blinds, boat launch ramps and other similar facilities, which are in great demand in New Jersey, are rarely developed due to shortfalls in funding. Hunting, fishing and birding are also sometimes restricted. I would also like to suggest, however, that the FWS could benefit from a review of fish and wildlife dependent recreation programs on similar State wildlife areas to provide a perspective on what it costs other resource agencies to administer comparable programs.

There are additional examples from other states, and I would like to share a few of these with you:

The State of Louisiana and the Fish and Wildlife Service have collaborated on a wide range of management programs including sharing heavy equipment to develop fire lines on wildlife management areas; sharing tree-planting and other specialized equipment to enhance their forest management programs; conducting joint wildlife surveys (bald eagle, midwinter waterfowl, turkey and deer); and cooperating in the distribution of acorns and seedlings used in bottom land hardwood restoration efforts.

In Louisiana, most disruptions caused by a shortfall of funds have been related to the inability of the National Wildlife Refuges to replace needed equipment when it wears out or to accomplish repairs in a timely fashion. Because land managers for both agencies place a high priority on cooperative resource-related projects, they have maintained these projects in the face of reduced budgets However, this cannot go on indefinitely in the face of shrinking operations and maintenance budgets for national wildlife refuges.

There are a number of examples of negative impacts the funding shortfall has had on Wisconsin National Wildlife Refuges:

- Exotic plant management has not been adequately conducted on NWRs and the result has been the accelerated infestation of adjacent habitats.

- At one time the FWS provided substantial assistance with the surveying of wildlife populations on NWRs. Curtailing these surveys has been particularly evident at the Horicon and Upper Mississippi River NWRs. These are the refuges which accommodate large numbers of species of particular concern, Canada geese and canvasbacks, respectively, that are present seasonally during migrations. As you know, the State Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the USFWS share jurisdictional responsibility for the conservation of migratory birds, and the Wisconsin DNR has thus assumed the survey workload. This has shifted available funds from other high priority work needs such as habitat management. It would seem that the cost

of management, including surveying, of these species should also be borne by the USFWS, in addition to the State.

- In some Wisconsin and New Jersey Refuges, lack of personnel results in hunting recreation potential which is going unrealized. An unintended consequence of this is the increase of wildlife populations, such as deer, which are having negative impacts on adjacent private landholdings. This may result in a loss of support for NWRs by neighboring landowners.

In sum, State Fish and Wildlife Agencies recognize the significant partnerships that have evolved between them and the USFWS regarding the management of fish and wildlife species and their habitats and the provision of high-demand fish and wildlife related recreational opportunities, including hunting, fishing, birding and other associated recreation. We encourage the Service to focus its budget requests on operations and maintenance needs so that the Service, in partnership with the State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, can continue to advance conservation and appropriate public use objectives of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspectives.

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF DR. ROLLIN D. SPARROWE

Testimony By
Dr. Rollin D. Sparrowe, President
Wildlife Management Institute
Before The
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife & Oceans
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
September 19, 1995

Mr Chairman:

My testimony is a purposely broad statement of concerns that the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) have in the operation and maintenance of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Our alliance was formed early in 1995 and is based on the unifying concept that maintenance and management of habitat provided by national wildlife refuges and their surroundings are essential to fish and wildlife populations. Our common interest is to help provide resources needed for refuges to function as intended since the first refuge established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903.

The main reason for forming our alliance is the long-term shortage of funds to operate and manage national wildlife refuges. This funding need has been documented with systematic appraisals by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The shortage significantly limits the Service's ability to appropriately manage fish, wildlife and their habitats. In many cases, programs are not funded to allow compatible beneficial public uses such as environmental education, fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing. Many refuges have been established and managed mainly in custodial fashion, and even after many years are not fulfilling the full purpose for which they were established.

Each of our organizations has unique relationships with national wildlife refuges, which several will describe in testimony. For example, one of my predecessors at the Wildlife Management Institute, Dr. Ira Gabrielson, served as the first Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and had a major role in establishing the National Wildlife Refuge System. Our Institute was substantially responsible for the addition of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey, and Key Deer National Wildlife Refuge in Florida. In my 22 years with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, I conducted research on national wildlife refuges, visited many repeatedly for sightseeing, hunting or fishing, wildlife viewing, or in an administrative role over the refuge division. I was directly involved in planning and budget preparation for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Mr. Chairman, many CARE member groups have helped the refuge system for decades. Ducks Unlimited, for example, has supplied millions of dollars in cooperative habitat improvements on and adjacent to refuges. The Izaak Walton League of America was instrumental in creating the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which has purchased more than 1 million acres for refuges since 1967. The League and its chapters were directly involved in establishing the Upper Mississippi Wildlife and Fish Refuge, National Elk Refuge, and helping

with other specific refuges. Other members of CARE have impressive and deep commitments to the refuge system. Some of those groups are here and will elaborate on their commitments during their testimony.

The Wildlife Society, the 9,500-member organization of professional wildlife biologists, and the American Fisheries Society, the 9,200-member scientific organization representing professional fishery biologists, both have worked for and supported the professional framework within which refuge managers apply their trade. The CARE group believes that the wildlife refuge system contains examples of lands managed in the highest professional traditions for sustaining habitats, fish and wildlife, and enjoyment of them by people. Effective science-based management of fish and wildlife is important for refuges and drives our interest in seeing them meet their full potential.

Over the past two years CARE has requested and received detailed information from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about the refuge maintenance backlog and consequences of the chronic funding shortfalls, details of which the Service provided for the record at a hearing before this Subcommittee on July 25, 1996. One major strategy for coping with the problem is cost reduction, which the Service has employed widely. During the past 15 years, refuges have been managed in complexes rather than individually, many have no staff present on a regular basis, and expenditures for operational tasks have been deferred. Programs such as wildlife monitoring, boundary posting, planning, and recreational program administration have been cut back. Another strategy, cost sharing, occurs through the Challenge Cost-Share Program, matching projects funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and state administration of selected programs particularly in recreation. In addition, cost recovery through user fees is currently under consideration by the Congress. While we are interested in seeing the results of the experimental fee demonstration program initially authorized in the 1996 Omnibus Appropriations bill, we do not believe that a recreation fee system provides the answer to the refuge system problem. Indeed, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's FY 1997 Fisheries and Wildlife Assessment concluded that "relying on user fees or increasing fees within reason will not impact the O&M problems significantly." Moreover, fee collection would be unlikely to generate significant additional revenues in numerous units of the refuge system.

CARE members believe in and encourage cost reduction and cost sharing in every way practicable. However, the public good cannot be fully served without significant additional federal dollars being appropriated in the future. The value of this nation's investment in national wildlife refuges must be protected for future generations. The Department of the Interior, with the aid of Congress, could narrow this funding gap considerably with targeted additional funding for operation and maintenance. We recently met with Interior officials to urge that they elevate the priority of funding operation and maintenance on refuges. We offered to help sell the idea to the public and Congress. We also strongly suggested that the benefits of such funding be documented as this investment is made. We were assured the Secretary is supportive of the need

It is important to explain why the Service continues to purchase refuge land while experiencing the maintenance backlog. In the past, parcels of public lands have been converted into refuges, and some whole refuges have been purchased by others and donated to the Service. By far, however, refuge acquisitions are done through a process of planning and publicizing the intended geographical extent of a refuge, and then pursuing acquisition almost solely on a willing seller basis. Such acquisitions in established refuges can take decades, and currently make up the bulk of annual land purchases. For example, the refuge at Cape May, New Jersey initially contained more than 250 individual properties and is being acquired gradually as willing sellers are identified.

New refuges must be added over time on an "as needed" basis. This does not constitute irresponsible expansion of the system, but rather an attempt to forestall more dramatic problems with species extinction or reductions. While CARE groups believe that addressing the operation and maintenance funding backlog is a high priority, we recognize the cost effectiveness of initiating new refuges selectively as needed.

Much interest is focused these days on endangered species, fish and wildlife diversity, and their high social and economic value. National wildlife refuges often provide, in a geographically limited area, the needs of fish and wildlife that formerly occupied much more dispersed habitats which no longer exist. They constitute an investment in lowering future costs by preventing declines which require more drastic measures, such as listing as threatened or endangered.

Refuges offer many examples of success. Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas played a major role in restoring the endangered whooping crane from less than 20 individuals decades ago to more than 130 currently. Refuge lands in migration routes north to Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park have helped sustain the whooping crane's recovery. National Elk Refuge in Wyoming provides core habitat for wintering Rocky Mountain elk--exemplary of a solution to growing urbanization of wildlife winter ranges in the Rocky Mountains. During the past six years in South Carolina, 10,448 acres have been acquired for the establishment of the Ace Basin National Wildlife Refuge in one of the largest undeveloped estuaries on the Atlantic coast. This federal commitment has been an important component of a broad-based conservation effort in and around the estuary by state, other federal agencies, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, and local private land owners. As a result of these commitments, approximately 200,000 acres are now being managed cooperatively to help bald eagles and wood storks, both listed species.

Just 10 years ago, North American waterfowl were in crisis, having declined to all time record low numbers during extended drought. The managed lands and more stable water levels of national wildlife refuges helped sustain the dwindling flocks until the rains returned, and habitat is once again more widely favorable. North American waterfowl are on their way to the largest fall flight in almost 30 years during the coming months. Refuges were a vital part of that recovery.

Some refuges' situations are complex. Several CARE members are involved in current efforts to complete the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge by securing lands passed to Native peoples during the 1979 Native Land Claims settlement process. These groups would like to help government secure the refuge before financial needs of Native peoples dramatically alter some of the most unspoiled fish and wildlife habitat in North America. Some CARE members have been responsible for significant sums of privately donated funding going toward this effort.

CARE members unanimously support preparation of conservation management plans for all refuges and the periodic review of those plans. By a public planning process, the interests of various constituent groups can best be accommodated and the fears of landowners about refuge creation and management can be alleviated. Clearly stated purpose, specific acquisition intents, easements, or other land management arrangements can be provided. Assured public uses, often traditionally occurring at the time of purchase, or clear justification for ending uses if needed, can be out front for all to see. Finally, such plans can provide a blueprint for the Congress and the American people to determine what is wanted in the refuge system and what the costs will be. We still are awaiting a system-wide plan from the Department of the Interior.

Some CARE members are particularly concerned that funding shortages might limit recreational uses by their constituents on refuges. The record shows an addition of 47 new refuges open to hunting and 26 refuges open to fishing and other compatible uses. Member groups recognize that management programs must be funded and increased in effectiveness or such opportunities will be lost. Significant opportunities for economic benefits to local communities through bird watching, hunting, fishing, or other uses will be lost if these programs are not enhanced.

Finally, this unique alliance, as you referred to it in your opening statement on July 25, 1996, wishes to suggest a desired future condition for the National Wildlife Refuge System. That goal is one in which all refuges are fully staffed and operating in a manner sufficient to achieve the individual and collective purposes for which they were established. And, the habitat base provided by refuges and their surroundings sustain fish and wildlife that meet the needs of people, whether for viewing, study, hunting, fishing or merely for the sake of perpetuating wildlife and its values.

CARE members can unite behind a system of wildlife lands and waters that:

- Provides important habitats for migratory birds and for the recovery of species threatened with extinction .

- Serves as a catalyst for conservation of the nation's diverse array of fish, wildlife and other biota.

- Is widely recognized for scientific excellence in the management of wildlife and habitat. -

- Sustains habitats and fish and wildlife that provide exceptional public opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreation.

- Sets a standard of excellence for environmental education.

- Serves as a model for cooperative management with surrounding public and private lands.

- Provides a measure against which the use or abuse of unprotected lands can be measured.

- Is managed as a true system, with appropriate staffing and operating funding to fulfill its mission.

We appreciate the attention of this Subcommittee to the important issue of management and operation of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Our member groups are committed to working with this Subcommittee, with each other, and with the appropriate agencies to assure a brighter future for these vitally important landscapes which serve fish, wildlife and people.

Members of Cooperative Alliance of Refuge Enhancement

American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Ducks Unlimited
International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Izaak Walton League of America
National Audubon Society
National Rifle Association of America
National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Safari Club International
The Wilderness Society
The Wildlife Society
Trout Unlimited
Wildlife Legislative Fund of America
Wildlife Management Institute

PREPARED STATEMENT OF EVAN M. HIRSCHE

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Testimony By
Evan M. Hirsche, Director, National Wildlife Refuge Campaign
National Audubon Society
Before The
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife & Oceans
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
September 19, 1996

Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Operations and Maintenance funding backlog suffered by the National Wildlife Refuge System. The mission of the National Audubon Society, representing more than 550,000 Americans nationwide, is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.

Audubon's history with the National Wildlife Refuge System dates back to 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt established the first refuge, Pelican Island, in Florida, by executive order. Roosevelt was responding to cries from early Audubon Societies and others about the marauding of plume species for feathers to adorn women's clothing at the turn of the century. Before the end of his presidency in 1909, Roosevelt established 53 other sanctuaries that have served as the foundation of the current System.

Audubon societies hired wardens to watch over Roosevelt's first wildlife sanctuaries. Today, National Audubon's 518 chapters throughout the country play a pivotal role at many wildlife refuges, assisting with volunteer coordination, public education, citizen science and maintenance projects. Auduboners have contributed thousands of hours at wildlife refuges, helping managers meet some of their basic needs where funding limits adequate staffing.

For example, at Brigantine NWR in New Jersey the Atlantic Audubon Society has recently begun conducting weekly bird surveys after budget cuts forced the termination of the refuge biologist. The group also helps maintain trails, leads tours and conducts an annual refuge clean up. The Ohio State Audubon Council has paid for a range of projects from interpretive boardwalks to bridges at the Ottawa NWR from a fund established by the state's Audubon chapters.

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Audubon views the National Wildlife Refuge System as being critical to the survival of migratory bird species. Though mostly comprised of small "islands" of habitat, many of the 511 refuge units are important to the successful migration of millions of birds that travel along the Pacific, Central, Mississippi and Atlantic flyways. Birds that migrate from nesting grounds on the Yukon Delta or Kanuti refuges in Alaska may stop short at places like Klamuth Basin NWR in Oregon or Aransas NWR in Texas; others may head for distant lands as far as Antarctica. To migratory birds, the Refuge System represents a vital network of feeding and nesting stops upon which their survival depends.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is one of this country's most remarkable natural assets and is unique among the federal land systems, dedicated primarily to the conservation of wildlife. Refuges provide havens for a vast array of wildlife and plant species and serve as a bulwark against further population declines of threatened and endangered species.

The Committee has expressed concern that, in spite of operations and maintenance funding shortfalls, the Fish and Wildlife Service continues to acquire habitat for refuges. Audubon believes that the loss of habitat is the single most serious threat to this country's diversity of species. As population pressures increase, opportunities to set aside habitat vital to the survival of birds, plants and other wildlife will be lost. It is our view that unmanaged habitat can always be improved while habitat that is destroyed is rarely recovered. Audubon fully supports the expansion of the National Wildlife Refuge System and endorses the Fish and Wildlife Service's policy of purchasing land from willing sellers.

Bald Knob NWR in Arkansas is a textbook case of how unmanaged acquisitions provide valuable habitat for wildlife. Recently acquired as a satellite of Cach River NWR in northeastern Arkansas, Bald Knob encompasses 14,000 acres of mostly former agricultural lands that yielded rice and soy beans. The low-lying property came equipped with an irrigation system and good water control with working pumps. Currently managed in a "custodial" fashion, the refuge provides valuable habitat for many waterfowl species including mallards, Canada, snow and white fronted geese, and the largest congregation of pintails in Arkansas. It also harbors at least one bald eagle nest.

Bald Knob's comprehensive management plan, completed two years ago, calls for the reforestation of at least 4,000 acres to provide bottomland hardwood forest for migratory neotropical birds. When funding becomes available for restoration work, this tract will complete a corridor for wildlife spanning from the foot of the Ozark Mountains to the confluence of the White and Mississippi Rivers.

Land acquisition can also help safeguard local economies. At Kodiak NWR in Alaska, local sport, subsistence and commercial fishermen who rely on healthy salmon stocks will benefit from recent inholding acquisitions purchased with Exxon Valdez damage funds.

Additionally, acquiring habitat can help reduce management costs on refuges. By purchasing 400 acres in three parcels at Maryland's Blackwater NWR, the FWS created an impoundment for habitat management while at the same time solving expensive management issues for the refuge staff. Previously, the properties were bisected by a road that allowed uncontrolled access to areas adjacent to the refuge. The easy access resulted in illegal hunting on refuge lands and harmful public use including littering and general wildlife disturbance. Consequently, the refuge staff was required to increase patrols and management oversight to protect the refuge's resources. Now that the FWS has acquired the property and closed the road, uncontrolled public access has been curtailed. The result is a reduced number of patrols and management hours devoted to the area.

While Audubon supports a strategy of acquiring land from willing sellers to help maximize the potential for wildlife on new and existing refuges, we also support exploring easement and cooperative agreement strategies to help expand the Refuge System. The new Silvio Conte NWR in the Connecticut River watershed, for example, will rely mostly on conservation easements and cooperative agreements with local land owners, state agencies and private organizations to complete the project. Of the total 78,404 acres targeted for protection over the next 15 years, only 6,530 are slated for fee title acquisition.

Several strategies have been developed to help remedy the System's operations and maintenance backlog. It has been suggested by some that local volunteerism can compensate for the shortage of O&M funding on refuges. Despite volunteer assistance from Audubon chapters and other dedicated organizations and individuals, volunteer support on refuges cannot be expected to fully supplant many of the more technical aspects of important operations and maintenance projects such as habitat restoration, species monitoring and facility upkeep.

Opportunities also exist for cost-sharing, and revenue enhancement concepts are being explored. We believe, however, that such programs will make only a dent in the $440 million maintenance backlog identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Most recently there has been a call for expanded entrance and user fee collections on refuges as a way to reduce the O&M backlog. The dispersed nature of refuge visitation generally results in high collection costs and low rates of return for fees. Unlike national parks, most wildlife refuges have

several access points that go unmonitored, making fee collections more difficult. Further, funding limitations make it virtually impossible on most refuges to build collections facilities and to provide adequate staffing.

In FY1993, the Fish and Wildlife Service reported receipts of $1.7 million in entrance and users fees. Of this total, the Emergency Wetland Resources Act required that seventy percent go toward land acquisition under the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, leaving $517,000 for refuge operations. However, the FWS estimates that it actually cost them $758,000 to collect these fees resulting in an overall loss of $241,000. An experimental program currently underway that returns user fees to the individual refuges will supply important information about the feasibility of user fees. However, it is unlikely to provide more than a token reduction in the maintenance needs of refuges.

In our view, a substantial increase in federal funding over the short term will help make the Refuge System more self-sufficient over the long term. By investing in refuges Congress invests in people and communities. Each spring and fall, as millions of migratory birds make their way to nesting and wintering locations, millions of people flock to refuges to view these magnificent spectacles. A 1994 report examining the economic impacts of birding at National Wildlife Refuges shows that the average visitor is worth between $21 and $145 to local communities, and at the eight refuges surveyed, contributed between $603,000 and $14 million to the surrounding communities.

Birding in the United States now accounts for between $5 and $9 billion annually in goods and services; that's roughly the amount spent each year by movie goers and professional sporting event spectators. In the September, 1996 issue of *Wild Bird* magazine, an article identifies the "top 100" birding "hotspots" in the U.S. and Canada. No less than 50% of these sites are refuges. More and more, refuges are the places Americans are going to learn about and appreciate our diverse wildlife heritage. By investing in habitat restoration *and* interpretive facilities, we can help to ensure that a greater number of communities across the country benefit from the System environmentally, economically and socially.

The Committee has also requested our view of comprehensive management plans. Audubon believes that these plans are vital to successfully managing refuge units within the System. The comprehensive management planning process is critically important to providing continuity in refuge management over time. It ensures that regardless of staff changes and myriad external influences, the refuge will continue on a course that both wildlife managers and the local community have determined to be in the best interest of wildlife.

Comprehensive management plans offer tremendous opportunities for refuge managers to educate local people about the purposes, goals and objectives of refuges, and in turn, allows the public to express their views about proposed plans and to suggest alternatives. By involving the public, managers are able to invest communities in their refuge and secure widespread support for the unit's objectives. The planning process also forces managers to give serious consideration to prioritizing.

The National Wildlife Refuge System in its mission, ecological diversity and geographical scope is like no other system of lands in the world. It is home to 700 species of birds, 220 species of mammals, 250 species of reptiles and amphibians, 200 species of fish, and countless plant species. 55 refuges support a fifth of plants and animals listed as endangered or threatened. It is a truly magnificent asset to the American people, yet among the U.S. federal lands systems it receives a scant $2.15 per acre versus the Park Service which receives $13.28. The National Audubon Society is committed to finding a solution to the Refuge System's funding difficulties and looks forward to working with the Committee as we endeavor to reach this goal.

THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

STATEMENT OF JAMES R. WALTMAN
DIRECTOR, REFUGES AND WILDLIFE PROGRAM
THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY
BEFORE THE FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS SUBCOMMITTEE
REGARDING THE OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE OF THE
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM
SEPTEMBER 19, 1996

The Wilderness Society appreciates this opportunity to testify on an issue of such importance to the nation's fish and wildlife and to our 315,000 members. The Wilderness Society is a non-profit membership organization devoted to preserving wilderness and wildlife, protecting America's prime forests, rivers, deserts, wetlands, and shorelands. Like other organizations testifying at this hearing, the Society has had a long-standing commitment to the sound management and well-being of the National Wildlife Refuge System. For us that commitment dates back to our founding in 1935 by Aldo Leopold and other ecologists and professional land managers, and was expressed in the 1950s by the successful efforts of Olaus Murie, our president at the time and himself a former Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, to establish the magnificent Arctic National Wildlife Range on the northern slope of Alaska.

The Wilderness Society is very pleased to be a member of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (C.A.R.E), a diverse group of more than 15 organizations with a common goal of securing adequate funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System. While the various organizations that make up CARE may have different priorities, we all agree that the Refuge System is a national treasure that needs and deserves much greater attention and support than it has received in past years. In that light, we appreciate the two hearings that this Subcommittee has held on this subject and the modest increase for operations and maintenance funding requested by the administration. We hope Congress will supplement the level proposed by the administration's with additional funding for this critical program.

You have asked us to give our assessment of the Refuge System's operations and maintenance backlog, the appropriateness of acquiring new refuge lands, and the value of refuge planning. Before answering those specific questions, I would first like to lay out our vision for the National Wildlife Refuge System. The questions posed by the Subcommittee should be answered in the context of this vision.

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A VISION FOR THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

The National Wildlife Refuge System is in the truest sense, the living part of our national lands. Refuges are places where we can feel, with more confidence than anywhere else in our country, that wildlife comes first. The System provides an insurance policy for our wildlife heritage -- protecting the cultural, recreational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic, and medicinal values that are so critical to our future.

Our vision for the Refuge System is a broad habitat-based land system at the forefront of the nation's wildlife and ecosystem conservation efforts. In that spirit, refuges should be staffed by the nation's most highly trained and skilled conservation biologists and wildlife managers. Refuges should have research and inventory systems in place to enable them to provide an early warning system of trends in wildlife populations and ecosystem integrity. Refuges should be on the cutting edge in determining optimal habitat and population management strategies and be adequately funded and staffed to implement these strategies. Refuges should be models and catalysts for wildlife conservation efforts on surrounding federal, state, and private lands -- as Fish and Wildlife Service Director Mollie Beattie envisioned, the refuges should be "anchor points for biological diversity." And refuges should be known for providing the highest quality opportunities for environmental education and fish and wildlife-oriented recreation, including wildlife observation, fishing, hunting, and nature photography. The system can and should provide invaluable experiences through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife.

Of particular interest to The Wilderness Society, the Refuge System should be at the forefront of efforts to protect and recover threatened and endangered species and to prevent other species from ever becoming threatened or endangered. This testimony will focus on that aspect of refuge management and protection.

Long before there was an Endangered Species Act, the Refuge System was there to protect and restore imperiled species. In the early years of the century, President Theodore Roosevelt established refuges to save our egrets, herons, terns, gulls and other birds from the market hunters who sought plumes for the feathered hats that were the height of fashion in those days. Roosevelt also established refuges to save the large mammals -- bison, elk, and antelope -- that were also threatened with extinction. Waterfowl were the focal imperiled species of the 1930s and 1940s and the focus of much expansion of the Refuge System.

We note with great disappointment that while this Congress and its predecessor have invested great effort in evaluating and proposing amendments to the Endangered Species Act, to our knowledge not a single hearing has been held to review opportunities to improve endangered species conservation on the Refuge System. Clearly, efforts to conserve species on refuges are more cost effective, more lasting, and less controversial than similar efforts on private lands or "multiple use" public lands. The National Wildlife Refuge System has been

right under our noses as a premier endangered species conservation tool, but so far we appear to be largely missing it.

The American public can be very proud of our National Wildlife Refuge System. The Refuge System is the only network of federal public lands that have been established specifically to conserve fish and wildlife. The System covers more than 92 million acres and includes units in all 50 states and several US territories. Extending from arctic Alaska to the subtropical Florida Keys, from coastal Maine to the far Pacific Islands, the Refuge System is the most comprehensive network of protected fish and wildlife habitats anywhere in the world.

The Refuge System is making a great contribution to endangered species conservation. Fifty-eight refuges have been established specifically to protect scores of threatened and endangered species -- from golden-cheeked warblers to loggerhead sea turtles, Columbian white-tailed deer to West Indian manatees, Iowa Pleistocene snails to Ash Meadows blazing stars. Another 302 refuges provide listed species with habitat at some point during their life cycles. More than 230 endangered and threatened species occur on national wildlife refuges and more than 350 candidate species have been recorded on refuges. More than 50 refuges provide designated critical habitat covering nearly half a million acres, and seventeen refuges are involved in listed species propagation and release programs. As a testament to the success of refuge management, according to Fish and Wildlife Service reports, 55 percent of the endangered and threatened species that occur on national wildlife refuges are stable or improving, while only 32 percent of species not found on refuges are stable or improving. Of those species that have had a special refuge designated for them, 68 percent are improving or stable.

Piping plovers are rebounding on the Atlantic coast thanks in part to efforts at E.B. Forsythe (New Jersey), Parker River (Massachusetts), Chincoteague (Virginia), and other refuges. Whooping cranes have increased significantly thanks to habitat protection and management at Arkansas NWR (Texas). Aleutian Canada geese numbers have increased in the last few years with assistance from San Joaquin NWR and other refuges in California's Central Valley. The masked bobwhite quail is making a comeback due to protection and reintroduction efforts at the Buenos Aires NWR (Arizona). Three endangered fish and half a dozen endangered plants are stable thanks to the Ash Meadows NWR (Nevada). Mississippi sandhill cranes are increasing in numbers thanks to the refuge established for and named after that endangered bird. The Delmarva peninsula fox squirrel is making a comeback on the Eastern Shore thanks in large part to recovery efforts at Blackwater NWR (Maryland), and Chincoteague NWR. Survival prospects for the Lange's metalmark butterfly and the Contra Costa wallflower have been greatly enhanced by the protections afforded to these species at Antioch Dunes NWR (CA).

FUNDING WOES ARE HOLDING THE REFUGE SYSTEM BACK

Unfortunately, throughout the system, the vision is struggling to survive. The Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that the National Wildlife Refuge System is operating with a maintenance backlog of $440 million and an annual operations deficit of at least $149 million and perhaps as much as $308 million. The litany of problems caused by this funding shortfall is imposing. Chronic underfunding in past years has led to the degradation of refuge habitats and wildlife populations. Invasions of exotic species, inadequate water supplies, and other problems plague many refuges, undermining their ability to meet their wildlife objectives. Deteriorating fences are allowing cattle and other livestock to trespass on a growing number of refuges, including Cabeza Prieta NWR in Arizona. Funding shortfalls have also put at risk popular wildlife-oriented recreation programs. An increasing number of refuges have been "complexed" leaving many of them without permanent staff or direct funding. Currently only 290 of the 508 refuges are staffed and some 250 formerly filled field station positions are now vacant. For example, the new Cape May refuge, which has been hailed as a potential gem in the system, recently lost its full time refuge manager position.

Fewer and fewer refuges have been able to hold full time biologist positions. As a result, even routine research and inventories are not being performed. According to a Fish and Wildlife Service database developed during the preparation of the 1992 draft Environmental Impact Statement on the Refuge System, only 59% of refuges had conducted breeding bird surveys, 32% had conducted full inventories of their mammals, 30% had inventoried their plants, 20% had inventoried their fish and reptiles, 18% had inventoried their amphibians, and only 5% had inventoried invertebrates. Only 28% of the refuges indicated that they had inventoried their biological communities and 15% indicated that they were incorporated into a state natural heritage program. Without a full understanding of what resources it harbors, the Refuge System can not meet its potential to nurture our wildlife heritage.

Management programs to help recover endangered, threatened, and candidate species, by restoring habitats and addressing resource threats are left unaccomplished on an increasing number of stations. The Fish and Wildlife Service reports a maintenance backlog of $13.6 million and $46.9 million in unmet operations funding for endangered species efforts on refuges. For example:

- The Crocodile Lakes NWR (Florida) has no staff based within two hours of the refuge. As a result, poaching of this endangered species continues. The refuge needs at least one full time employee.

- The Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR (Mississippi) needs funding to build new holding pens for this endangered species.. Ten of 19 endangered Mississippi sandhill cranes were killed by predators which broke through a deteriorating holding pen prior to the birds release.

- Piping plover breeding success has dipped at the E.B. Forsythe NWR (New Jersey) after sustained increases, perhaps because the refuge lost its seasonal position in charge of monitoring and protecting the birds from disturbance. The refuge needs funds to fill this position.

- Salinas River NWR (California) aspires to eradicate exotic plants and restore native buckwheat, the host plant for the endangered Smith's blue butterfly, but needs funds to do so.

- Malheur NWR (Oregon) desperately needs funds to build fish screens on its irrigation system to protect the redband trout, a candidate species for listing.

- Illegal dumping continues on the Lake Wales Ridge NWR (Florida) which has been established to protect endangered plants. The refuge needs a staff presence to combat this threat.

- Balcones Canyonlands NWR (Texas) has been established as an important part of the federal share of efforts to recover the golden-cheeked warbler, but needs funds for habitat assessments and management to meet its objective.

- Carolina Sandhills NWR (South Carolina) holds the largest refuge population of endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers and has plans for hardwood understory management needed by the birds, but these are left unfulfilled due to budget shortages.

- Ellicott Slough NWR (California) has plans to install tunnels beneath a road on the refuge to help protect the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander but lacks funds to build the tunnels.

- Completion and management of the National Key Deer Refuge (Florida) is the primary recovery action for the endangered Key deer. But mosquito ditches across refuge lands can be a death trap for the tiny deer. The refuge needs funds to re-fill the ditches.

While the task of making the Refuge System whole by its 100th anniversary in 2003 may seem daunting, it is well within reach compared to efforts for some other federal programs. While we support adequate funding for the national parks, it is noteworthy that the administration's proposed increase for the National Park Service for FY1997 actually exceeds the entire budget for the National Wildlife Refuge System. While some additional funds may be found in fee collection, new concessions policies, cost reductions, and cost sharing, the bulk of the work must be done with federal appropriations. Congress can start the System's recovery by appropriating at least the administration's requested increase for refuge operations and maintenance.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF THE REFUGE SYSTEM

Sound planning is an important process for any successful entity, whether it be a large corporation, a small town, or a national wildlife refuge. To properly manage the national wildlife refuges, the Fish and Wildlife Service must conduct thorough planning for these important public resources with full and open public involvement. Planning is needed to determine what biological resources and public opportunities exist on the refuge and surrounding areas; to decide what is needed and desired on the refuges in the future; to determine what threats exist to refuge resources; and finally to build a road map to address the threats and achieve the objectives established in the plan. We fully support the administration's proposed $2.5 million increase to expand comprehensive refuge planning.

LAND ACQUISITION CONTINUES TO BE CRITICAL

Much has been said about the Fish and Wildlife Service's ongoing land acquisition process. Some argue that the Service should suspend further expansion of the System in light of its funding woes. But this thinking is short-sighted. To meet our vision of a Refuge System at the forefront of wildlife conservation efforts, the System must continue to expand to meet the greatest conservation challenges of the day -- just as it did in the 1930s and 40s to address wetlands and waterfowl.

In fact, targeted land acquisition can actually reduce long-term management costs of refuges and certainly will reduce long term costs for the Fish and Wildlife Service by helping prevent species from needing to be added to the endangered species list in the first place and recovering those that are listed.

For years, the Fish and Wildlife Service has been working to complete the National Key Deer Refuge with funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The greatest factor in the deer's mortality has been auto collisions. If nothing else, such acquisition will reduce the ultimate total number of people who move into the deer's habitat and build a house, reducing the total number of cars, pizza delivery boys, and others driving through the refuge, reducing the staff time spent chasing after cars, pizza delivery boys and others driving too fast through the refuge, and reducing road kills. Without completion of this refuge, the very purpose that the refuge was established back in the 1950s is in jeopardy.

Land acquisition also supports numerous goals simultaneously. Expansion of the Back Bay NWR (Virginia) with funds from both the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (the "Duck Stamp Fund") is not only helping to improve habitat for migratory birds, it is also helping to restore Back Bay, a once famous fishery that has declined due to degradation of water quality. Habitat restoration on the new refuge lands, through either active or passive management, will reduce sedimentation and contamination of the bay and allow for the restoration of the fishery.

The Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge in coastal Alabama was established to protect disappearing natural coastline and the species that depend on the area, including the endangered Alabama beach mouse. Unfortunately, acquisition funding has not been consistent. As a result, private landowners within the refuge are now seeking to develop their property. The Fish and Wildlife Service endangered species staff are working on a Habitat Conservation Plan to allow development to proceed on land that the Fish and Wildlife Service refuge staff had planned to acquire. Its quite possible that costs for the Service's involvement in the HCP are comparable to what it would have cost to acquire the land in the first place.

CONCLUSION

This testimony has focused on endangered species in the Refuge System because we believe that the public cares deeply about our imperiled wildlife heritage. However, protected wildlife habitat in the Refuge System that supports whooping cranes, Key deer, Florida panthers, masked bobwhite quail, and other endangered species automatically supports hundreds of other species, including those popular for viewing, hunting, or fishing.

The National Wildlife Refuge System faces many challenges as it prepares for its 100th anniversary. Those who care about the System should not just look at the current problems but decide what our vision for the System will be for the twenty-first century. To meet our vision for the National Wildlife Refuge System, the operations and maintenance of the Refuge System must be adequately funded, the system must receive comprehensive conservation planning, and the System must continue to expand to address the wildlife conservation challenges of the day.

As conditioned by our statement, SCI endorses the following CARE group goals.

Finally, this unique alliance, as you referred to it in your opening statement on July 25, 1996, wishes to project a vision of a desired future for a National Wildlife Refuge System. In a future in which all refuges are fully staffed and operating in a manner sufficient to achieve the individual and collective purposes for which they were established, the habitat base provided by refuges and their surroundings can sustain fish and wildlife that meet the needs of people, whether for viewing, study, hunting, fishing or merely for the sake of perpetuating wildlife and its values.

CARE members can generally unite behind a system of wildlife lands and waters that:

- Provides important habitats for migratory birds and for the recovery of species threatened with extinction .

- Serves as a catalyst for conservation of the nation's diverse array of fish and wildlife.

- Is widely recognized for scientific excellence in the management of wildlife and habitat.

- Sustains habitats and fish and wildlife that provide exceptional public opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation.

- Sets a standard of excellence for environmental education.

- Serves as a model for cooperative management with surrounding public and private lands.

- Provides a measure against which the use or abuse of unprotected lands can be measured.

- Is managed as a true system, with appropriate staffing and operating funding to fulfill its mission.

- Is managed for public uses compatible with achieving fish and wildlife objectives.

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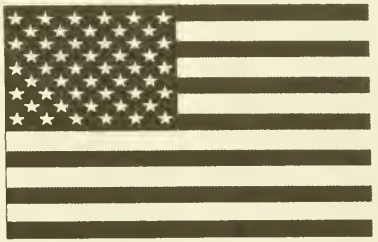

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF SUSAN LAMSON

The National Rifle Association of America (NRA) is pleased to be here today to offer our support to the National Wildlife Refuge System. The NRA represents over 2 million of America's hunters, a group that cares very deeply about the health of our Refuge System. We joined the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) on behalf of our hunter members in order to lend assistance within the sporting, scientific, and environmental communities in finding avenues to relieve the current operations & maintenance (O & M) backlog plaguing the Refuge System.

From the Central Valley of California to the saltwater marshes along Brigantine Bay, the hunting community has a very special relationship with the National Wildlife Refuge System. Whether its participating in a hunting program, providing volunteer muscle for habitat restoration, or spending a summer day introducing a son or daughter to wildlife, America's hunters know and fully appreciate what the Refuge System provides. Hunters know that the Refuge System in many ways is an oasis of wildlife lands in a desert of constantly diminishing habitats. Hunters know that refuge units provide outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation at a time when access for hunting, fishing, bird watching and other wildlife related outdoor activities is becoming more and more difficult to find. And hunters know that millions of their dollars have been invested in these lands for more than half a century towards the betterment of all wildlife and all of America's citizens.

And that's why America's hunters are concerned. We are concerned that our wildlife and recreational opportunities for ourselves and our fellow citizens to enjoy this splendid resource are likely to suffer because of the funding backlog that now casts a shadow over the future health of the System. We are concerned that the natural wonder of migrating Canada geese at Shiawassee, dabbling black ducks at Forsythe, or singing White-fronted geese at Sacramento may be in

trouble. And we are concerned that our investments in the Refuge System, both in time and money, are not getting the return it should or could. The hunting community has willingly contributed hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of hours of labor towards the acquisition and management of System lands. The NRA is confident that all of us want to ensure that this investment is protected.

The hunting community fully understands that sacrifices might be called for, but not for a moment should it be suggested that this sacrifice be put off another day -- not when refuge units are forced to forgo wildlife and habitat improvements because funding is not available. We're not talking about a few buildings in need of a fresh coat of paint. We're talking about refuges that don't have enough funding to plant forage crops for migratory waterfowl, refuges that can't repair or replace water management facilities, refuges that, in essence, cannot fulfill their mission of protecting habitat for our fish and wildlife resources. Knowing this, all of us should work together to find solutions that can be put into place as soon as possible. The participants in CARE have discussed many ideas, all of which recognize that our ultimate goal is to maintain the Refuge System's overriding mission of protecting fish and wildlife habitat.

In answer to questions posed in your letter of invitation, the NRA supports efforts by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to limit acquisition to the protection of lands that are critical to national priorities or that provide management efficiencies. The NRA wholeheartedly supports the need for each and every refuge to develop a comprehensive plan, thereby providing focus for prioritization of refuge activities and expenditures. However, knowing that the O & M backlog has already eclipsed the 400 million dollar mark, the NRA does not want to see the situation in which limited conservation dollars are stretched to the breaking point, possibly

leading to an unending merry-go-round in which "planning" for conservation becomes an end to itself.

One idea that has been discussed within CARE is setting aside a portion of increased O & M funding as a challenge grant program. Limited federal dollars would be matched with private-sector dollars which would expand the impact of Congressional appropriations while fostering greater partnerships for FWS.

As a founding member of CARE, our commitment to the Refuge System extends beyond our participation in this group. Independently, the NRA has contributed time and resources to assisting individual refuge units with specific needs. This direct involvement includes contributions of thousands of dollars during the past two years to refuges for land acquisition, habitat improvement, and access for the disabled. We are confident that one of the avenues available to help reduce the O & M deficit is the encouragement and development of greater partnerships between the FWS and private organizations like the NRA.

The NRA will continue our efforts, pulling together the collective will of its 2 million hunter members, assisting other conservation organizations, and working with the Congress to ensure that the health and viability of the Refuge System is not only maintained, but improved upon. All of us can agree--generations of Americans stand before us, we owe it to them to take the initiative now to reduce this funding crisis.

Supplement

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF AMOS S. ENO

TESTIMONY OF AMOS S. ENO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE FOUNDATION
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS
HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

REGARDING U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

SEPTEMBER 19, 1996

Thank you for holding this oversight hearing on National Wildlife Refuge operations and maintenance. We are in strong support of efforts to address this chronic problem in a responsible and effective manner.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization created by Congress in 1984, and dedicated to the conservation of natural resources--fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitat. Congress created the Foundation to pioneer the idea of conserving the nation's resources through partnerships and to promote proactive, private, voluntary solutions to environmental problems as an alternative to the regulatory, litigious, and highly politicized quagmire that characterizes so many environmental issues. Additionally, the Foundation prides itself on its ability to generate more than $2 in matching non-Federal dollars for every appropriated Federal dollar.

During the grant giving life of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, we have been active with the refuge system, recognizing the many problems facing a system where staffing is limited, habitat is degraded, and facilities receive inadequate attention. Among the more than 1,400 grants the Foundation has given are many which are directed specifically at refuge operational and maintenance problems. Here are but a few examples:

- a grant to construct a 1.25 mile dike to reverse channelization, promote the growth of emergent vegetation, and restore productivity to a 600-acre wetland in Utah's Bear River Refuge;

- management of a settlement involving an illegal taking of migratory birds in violation of the Migratory Bird Species Act, with funds to benefit Salton Sea NWR, California;

- a grant to purchase pumps and repair levees to restore 435 acres of wetlands in Cameron Prairie NWR, Louisiana;

- a grant to restore 334 acres of waterfowl, shorebird and songbird habitat through a varied system of water-level manipulations on former sod farm lands at Wallkill River NWR, New Jersey and;

- a grant to the National Wildlife Refuge Association, in conjunction with the Friends of Parker River NWR, MA, to assist in the development of more local groups to support National Wildlife Refuges so that local communities may more readily provide assistance to refuges.

While these matching grants are helpful, there is much more to be done. Each year the Foundation produces a Fisheries and Wildlife Assessment, a document which evaluates Federal efforts to care for our nation's natural resources. This year's assessment includes an article on the needs of the National Wildlife Refuge System entitled "Living on a Starvation Diet: the National Wildlife Refuge System". In it, the situation is summarized this way: "Current problems in the National Wildlife Refuge System include understaffed refuges (only 290 of its refuges have staff), vacant key staff positions, weakened biological programs, reduced data collection, unrestored habitat, postponement of actions to avert habitat degradation, unchecked spread of exotic species, restrictions on visitor facilities and other programs, and deferment of maintenance projects".

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation stands ready to continue to help mitigate the problems facing the National Wildlife Refuge System. Our proven ability to double or triple Federal appropriations for refuge operations and maintenance through a competitive challenge grant program, can be one asset in any expanded, multi-pronged effort to improve the health of our nation's wildlife refuges.

Mr. Chairman, we at the Foundation believe we have already contributed by helping to identify the problems through our Fish and Wildlife Assessments, by our involvement with the CARE group, and by providing for on the ground projects which address pressing needs. We know more needs to be accomplished and stand ready to provide additional assistance.

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September 30, 1996

The Honorable Jim Saxton, Chairman
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans
Committee on Resources
805 O'Neill House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the Wildlife Management Institute I wish to provide supplemental testimony to that I presented on September 19, 1996. At that time, I purposely spoke broadly of the concerns of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE), but based on testimony at the hearing I thought some additional perspectives from our Institute, and from my personal experience with refuges, might be helpful.

I am particularly concerned with the suggestion that the growth of the backlog in maintenance and operational (O&M) costs for National Wildlife Refuges is either a surprise, or a simple matter of poor management and a lack of foresight by the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). Budget documents submitted to the Congress by the Department of the Interior, and available to the public since the early 1980s, have documented this growing problem. Two major thrusts in the past under Presidents Ford and Reagan in the 1970s and 1980s, respectively, raised the issue and began efforts to address it with additional funding. Neither of those efforts were sustained for very long because of changes in Administrations and the Congress. The Department of the Interior and Fish and Wildlife Service bear some of the responsibility for changing their budget priorities over the years, but this has hardly been under their sole control.

In 1994, prior to the formation of the CARE group, detailed briefings provided to wildlife conservation groups identified inflation, growth of the system without operating funds, declining facility conditions, new statutory responsibilities without additional funds, rising demands for recreation, increasing conflicts with adjoining land uses, and increased personnel costs as factors contributing to the increase in the O&M backlog. Many of these factors are not under the control of the Service.

We think that many questions about the development of the O&M problem with refuges can be answered by information from the Fish and Wildlife Service. The right questions need to be formulated, and data can be presented for all to examine. Our Institute and others would welcome the opportunity to help clarify management and fiscal questions with factual data from the refuges. The concept of holding extensive hearings seems to us likely to further to delay addressing the real problems.

We agree that priorities must be established both for any additional refuge acquisitions, and for solutions to the O&M problem. We have met with the Department and the Service to stress to them the importance of prioritization of backlog issues. In addition, we have asked that results from additional funding be clearly documented. We believe such information can be useful to the Congress. As I said in testimony, it would be helpful if the Department would finally release some form of mission statement with priorities to use as a baseline against which to judge progress in development of the refuge system.

Concerning expansion of refuge missions and particularly land acquisition, there are additional considerations not presented at the hearing. Modern biological thought and direct experience with a variety of species tells us that small enclosed preserves are often inefficient at providing for the needs of wildlife. The expansion of the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge from 21 to 120,000 acres does not appear as frivolous as was suggested. Managing larger pieces of watersheds affecting critical wildlife habitats is increasingly important because of problems of water supply and quality, adjacent land uses, and the needs of wildlife involved. It happens that we now know that the Buenos Aires site includes great diversity of animals and plants not protected on other refuges. It's value goes well beyond a single species.

Judging the success or lack thereof in reintroduction of an endangered species cannot be done on a short term basis. Please recall that the wild turkey was threatened decades ago, and that development of successful restoration techniques required many decades of trial and error effort. Had we given up after the first 30 years of unsuccessful transplants of pen-reared turkeys, we would have missed the opportunity to refine those techniques and produce the tremendous success that now is reported across our entire country. It is important to note that the money spent on masked bobwhite quail was never available as refuge O&M money. We think that the needs of refuges should be considered separately from endangered species priorities, or we confuse the issue of prioritization.

I had a personal experience with a visit to Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge that gives a different look at the need for signs and fencing and the presumed good behavior of adjacent landowners. In my visit in 1993, I found less than 20 people running a refuge more than 100 miles long, with extensive boundary contact with both private and public grazing lands. During the trip, people were intercepted on the refuge shooting prairie dogs from their pickup truck. This was within a few miles of an imminent reintroduction site for the endangered black footed ferret. Brochures and information about the refuge said such shooting was illegal, yet

these people didn't see them and responded by saying they also didn't see any signs when they drove in. I would not be so quick as to condemn the need for signs at critical trail junctions or for attention in the future as to how such a refuge can be protected. My information indicates the final 25 miles (not 25,000 miles) of fence is now scheduled for completion after grazing interests have been given several years to demonstrate that an alternative solution of moving cattle would avoid trespass--it did not. If all the good neighbors adjacent to it or those who had access to it caused no problems, consideration of a fence would not be necessary. In the past two weeks, a court in Montana has upheld the Fish and Wildlife Service action in removing a grazing permit from a local grazer who wouldn't follow the rules when using refuge property. Being a good neighbor applies to both participants.

In 1993, my staff and I visited six very different refuges from coast to coast looking at management programs. We found problems with inadequate staffing, new authorities and responsibilities provided without more staff or money, and an inability to fully develop the refuge to meet the purposes for which it was established.

For example, we found a staff of three at Cypress Creek NWR in Illinois conducting public use programs like waterfowl hunting, yet working toward replanting 18,000 of their 20,000+ acres to bottomland hardwood timber. They were using boy scouts to collect hundreds of pounds of acorns in the fall, and other volunteers to plant the trees to restore the natural forest. At Sacramento NWR in California, we found a three-refuge complex to which had been added the Sacramento River NWR, with little or no new staffing and funding. This added new responsibilities for endangered salmon runs, a large new interface with the agricultural community, and the responsibility for restoration of the last of California's depleted riparian habitats. Yet this refuge also maintained appropriate hunting programs and aggressively worked with the state of California on public use.

This same kind of commitment and hard work was going on at the other four refuges we visited during our study and we believe it is characteristic of most of the refuges and their staffs. There are individual problems, but they can be addressed as they arise.

Again, we do not think it is necessary to hold expensive field hearings or equally expensive GAO review to gain the information necessary to prioritize what needs to happen to break this critical backlog of maintenance and operation costs on National Wildlife Refuges. Our Institute is ready to work with the Service to gather any needed documentation, and we think other CARE member groups will do so as well. Perhaps a meeting with your staff could focus on specific questions you think should be answered. Please have them contact me or Bob Byrne on my staff to facilitate such a discussion.

Mr. Chairman, we appreciate your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Rollin D. Sparrowe

Rollin D. Sparrowe
President

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ISBN 0-16-053793-2